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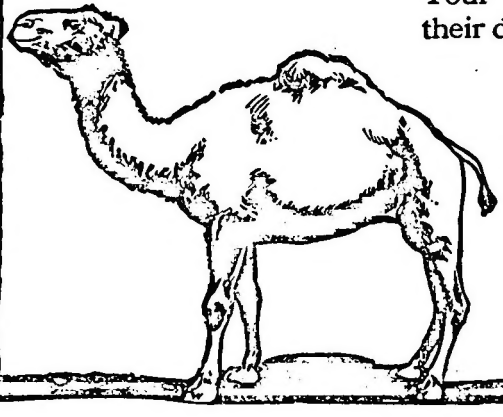

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July 18, 1919

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ABOUT TWO MEN

A MAN will fight hardest for his home. Even if he is a weakling and his home but a poor one. *Harry Carlton* is no weakling, and his home in Lost Deer Valley, among the great mountains of the West, is one worth fighting for. In "The Boss of Mirage," in our next issue, E. S. Pladwell tells how *Carlton* fought his fight.

TO SET fire to his ship. That is the temptation that comes to *Captain Williams*. And he falls. But ships can make a man as well as break him, as "Touching the Perils," by S. B. H. Hurst, will prove to you. This story of a man who comes back also appears in the First August ADVENTURE.

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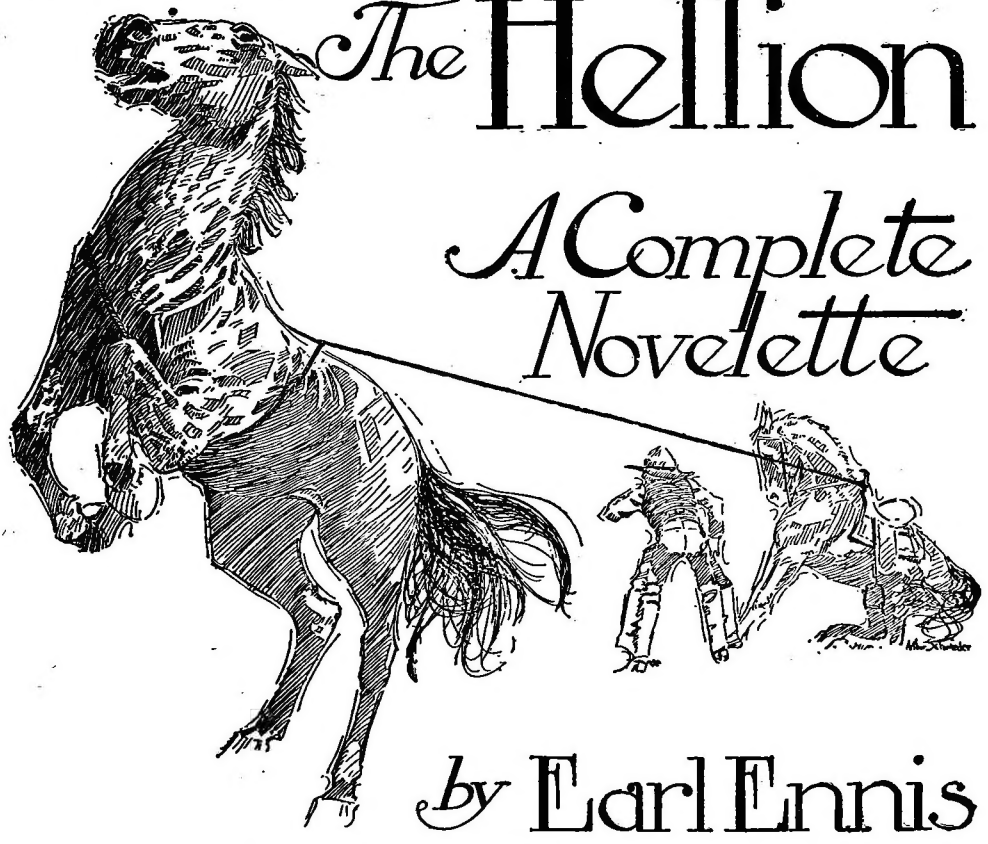
The Hellion

A Complete Novelette



by Earl Ennis

Author of "The Primitive Code" and "Hip Shootin'."

THE branding crew of the Hashknife Rancho was busy roping yearlings when a stranger rode into the corral. The newcomer was dust-stained and travel-weary and tanned to the tint of a squaw's elbow. He wore the raggedest pair of chaps ever seen in the cow-country. But it was apparent from the way he clamped his pony that he was a buckaroo to his finger-ends.

" 'Harmonica' Davis is the monniker," he said. "I've punched 'em from San Anton' to Thousand Islands. I'm aimin' to wrastle a few for the Hashknife. How come?"

"Latigo" Johnson, who handled the "irons" at round-ups and by right of seniority was entitled to opinions, nudged "Slim" Williams with his elbow.

"He listens some modest for a dusty horned-toad," he remarked.

"Yep," retorted Slim thoughtfully, "but you never can tell. I seen toads in my time could bite like ——"

Johnnie Murray, the foreman, strolled over and measured the stranger up. There

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was something about him he liked.

"We're only payin' twenty and found," he said shortly.

"Gimme the found!" The stranger's tone was tragic. "I ain't et since yesterday, the which an ornery coyot' done chawed up my last hunk o' chuck steak while I was sleepin'. The twenty ain't no inducement alongside o' real food."

The foreman grinned.

"All right," he said. "You're hired. Mosey over to the chow-house and tell the Chink to scare you up some eats."

The newcomer untied his hat and mopped his forehead on his shirt sleeve.

"My 'paint' here's kinda hollow hisself," he announced. "You see, he ain't been eatin' regular neither."

He indicated the tired pony with its head drooping to the ground. The foreman gave him a curious look.

"Go get fed yourself," he ordered. "One of the boys'll look after the *caballo*."

The newcomer nodded and started off toward the ranch-kitchen. The foreman swung on Slim Williams.

"Get that? Worryin' 'bout his hoss, and plumb hungry hisself. I'll bet he's a blamed good puncher!"

With which sapient remark he opened a note-book and added Harmonica Davis to the Hashknife pay-roll.

It is an unexpressed but thoroughly understood axiom of the cow-country that every man shall stand on his own feet. Measured by this standard, Harmonica Davis won instant popularity. From the very first there were several things that endeared him to the rest of the outfit. One was his skill on the traditional mouth-organ, which operated as an instantaneous touchstone to popularity and which he frankly credited for his adopted nickname.

"I don't exactly reccomember what my folks tied on to me for a handle," he explained on one occasion when questioned about his first name. "The first mornin' some maverick drops a mouth-organ into my crib, and, from the plumb natural way I cottoned to it, they went and tied 'Harmonica' on to me, some like an undertaker hangs crêpe on a door. An' I been signin' checks with it ever since."

No one disputed Harmonica's claim to his peculiar nomenclature. His skill on the range's universal musical instrument was beyond cavil. Curled on a fence-top, or tucked in a corner of the bunk-house under the light of a smoky lamp, he would perform what seemed to the enthralled punchers plain wonders in harmony on the little instrument he cupped in his supple hands.

Husky riders who owned to no sentiment in their make-up would develop a sudden yearning for some of his haunting erratic melodies. Outside of one or two favorites which he kept in stock, the whole of his repertoire was his own. Bits and scraps he had somewhere heard were blended and modified to fit the buoyant key of his own nature, to be given expression within the limitations of the vibrating reeds.

"Say, Harm," some hardened roper would say, "give us that funny one with the tickles in it."

Harmonica would hump over his hands and "triple-tongue" with all the abandon of an enthusiastic cornetist. The rest of the outfit would beat time with boots and hats and supply words of their own making to the air.

Another thing which wound Harmonica within the tendrils of the outfit's affections was his predilection for picking the wildest devil of a horse he could find at a *rodeo* and taming him down for saddle stock. At this particular accomplishment, expert as were the boys of the Hashknife crew, he soon demonstrated that he had no peer. A standing of this sort is always accorded a mark of esteem where horse-breaking is all in a day's work and the good rider the general average rather than the exception.

In Harmonica's case the hilarity of the occasion increased unfailingly with the degree of risk attached. The feat in its final development was magnetically his own. It was his maddest accomplishment to select some wild-eyed, shaggy-maned "cayuse" just in from the coulees, double-cinch a saddle on him and, clamped on his back like a pair of ice-tongs, go churning and pitching around the roping-corral, playing "Yankee Doodle" on his harmonica the while he whacked out the time on the withers of the contorting animal with his battered felt hat. This spectacle never failed to draw enthusiasm from even the most sardonic.

"The li'l' son-of-a-gun," Johnnie Murray would say. "That *hombre* would ride a bolt of lightnin' if he could get leather on it!"

Harmonica's good humor proved to be

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his third and perpetual attraction. The most consummate and continuous teasing never appeared to upset his equilibrium, nor the most boisterous personal abuse arouse him to anger. It came to be a byword how he could take punishment from both animals and men and still come up smiling. The story of the manner in which he whipped "Bud" Chalmers, erstwhile fistic champion from Solari, in a grueling contest that lasted from noon until the late October moon laid the shadows of the yucca across the sand, is still told to strangers.

Always the teller of the story brings out one point—that, when both men fell near unconscious from exhaustion, one beaten and the other victorious, it was Harmonica Davis who grinned through the crimson smear and "reckoned" he'd have a cigaret—and then fainted away with the tobacco clutched in his fingers.

In the natural course of events Harmonica heard of the Hellion as he heard of other traditions of the cow-country. It came up one hot Summer night when the night patrol had been replaced by wire fences and a session of "pitch" was the main item of interest in the bunk-house. It came at the end of the game. Johnnie Murray laid down his hand and gathered in the chips that represented, in negotiable securities of the range, one week's salary of "Locomotive" Jones.

"You got a disposition that's a cross between a pop-eyed Gila and the Hellion," growled Locomotive, disconsolately.

"That's powerful kind of you," the foreman replied. "I feels that honored at bein' compared with the Hellion I could bust."

A ripple of laughter went around the circle.

"Yeah," jeered Locomotive. "You're both alike, you are—a pair of low-down, no-'count, wall-eyed——"

"Listen to li'l' choo-choo gettin' up steam," interrupted the foreman. "A person'd think you had sand enough to nachully go out an' do somethin' once in a while instead of gettin' up on yore hind laigs and yelpin' all the time."

Locomotive's only retort was a contemptuous snort. Harmonica, who had been an interested listener, leaned on the edge of his bunk and rolled a cigaret.

"Might a grub-stunted runt of a cowpunch rise to inquire as to who this here Hellion is that you gents is gettin' all het up over?" he asked.

There was a moment's incredulous wonder, broken by an exclamation from "Seven-up" Haskins.

"I'll be throwed and singed!" he muttered. "You don't mean you never heard of the Hellion?"

Harmonica gave him a cheerful smile and licked the brown paper he held in his fingers with elaborate care.

"Nary a hear," he declared. "What is it? Male, female or four-legged?"

The foreman answered the question.

"The Hellion," he said, "is a male hoss, the which we calls a stallion hereabouts, with the gol-blamedest female disposition that ever larruped a wire fence."

Harmonica's face lighted.

"Hŭm," he commented. "I'd sure like to hear about him." He accented the pronoun.

There was a general shuffling of feet as various punchers sought out comfortable spots in anticipation of the story to come. The boys who were playing pitch promptly threw the cards to one side and cocked their feet on the table, while others in the room moved forward that they might be within easier ear-shot.

"Go on, Johnnie, shoot!" It was Seven-up's voice.

"Why me?" the foreman countered.

"You got the fancy touches of or'tory to paint the animile right."

Johnnie Murray sighed.

"The way you *hombres* wish these here onpleasant jobs of eddicatin' newcomers on to me is worse than an ol' woman takin' castor-ile, an' 'bout as pleasant."

Whereupon, having "had his say," he lighted a cigaret and proceeded to unfold the tale of the Hellion, the wild horse of the Mojave, starting with the cowboy's usual preliminary—

"Well, it was thisaway——"

II

WHATEVER fiction may have attached itself to the reputation of the Hellion in bunk-house gossip throughout the range, there was no doubt but that there existed substantial foundation for the stories told about him. His mother had been a brawling ill-natured mare of no particular distinction. His

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father had been a vagrant stallion of good lines but impossibly perverse—too much so, in fact, to be of any value for range work. The colt had worried along through the younger years of his life, bitten and mistreated by his mother, kicked about by his father and detested by the whole Hashknife aggregation. When one morning the stallion had been accidentally killed by a drunken roper who tried to crease him with a rifle-bullet, the colt, who had won his sobriquet of the Hellion by his continued distemper, departed to pastures new. No one went after him, and most of the outfit saw him go with relief.

"We are goin' to have trouble with *diablillo*," Johnnie Murray had said as he watched him disappear over the crest of the distant ridge. "He's got the makin's of an all-fired good skunk in him. You wait 'bout two years, that's all."

The foreman had been correct in his prophecy. The two years had elapsed, and the Hellion was at the height of his deviltry. From an untutored colt he had graduated into an expert raider. His chief infamy lay in his ability to steal choice mares from under the noses of night riders engaged in keeping the herds within bounds. Guarding a flock of nervous animals at night, with only the light of the stars to mark off the herd from the vastness of other shadows, becomes, for the most part, an affair of sound and intuition. Under ordinary conditions, with experienced punchers on duty and intelligent cow-ponies under saddle, the task is comparatively simple. But with the Hellion at large the task grew to sizable proportions.

Out in the dark and silences would come a peculiar shrill of penetrating intensity. The sound would start the herd to milling in instant confusion. The punchers would curse and ply their quirts and with shouts and stinging leather attempt to keep the suddenly electrified mass within some semblance of formation. But always, despite their utmost efforts, there would come the quick drum of hoofs and answering calls with the sound of retreating feet off toward the hills. The morning light would show, on count, a shortage of some of the best stock, which had flitted away to join the Hellion's brood.

Cattlemen do not long stand for this sort of tyranny. Well-organized attempts were made to eliminate the animal that was the cause of it all. The results showed such efforts to be just so much wasted time. The nearest approach to success took place when the Stillson gang trapped the Hellion in a narrow sandstone valley with sides that were almost sheer. Spreading out with a handful of their best ropers along the floor of the valley, they closed the ends and rode in for a fall.

As they came within rifle-range of their quarry, a streak of black shot up the steep slope of the cañon wall, straight to the top. It was an impossible slant with little for a toe-hold, yet the Hellion made it, the gravel shifting and sliding under his spinning hoofs. Good marksmen as were all the Stillson boys, there was not one among them who raised a weapon. The feat was too spectacular. So the only chance had been lost. No one had come that close to him again.

These things and more Johnnie Murray told Harmonica Davis as they sat in the dim light of the bunk-house—tales of a wild horse with near-human intelligence and an acute cunning seldom accumulated within one equine lifetime. Harmonica's eyes sparkled as he listened, and he hunched forward, drinking in every word.

"An' so," concluded the foreman, "we all just nachully let him alone. I ain't doubtin' the Hellion reckoned the same as bein' blamed good judgment on our part. He's a plumb smart hoss and an ornery one, and he's been havin' it his own way for a long time. But one of these here days he's goin' to meet up with his Waterloo, the which is sure goin' to be a passel of joy to me."

Harmonica Davis smiled—a slow, wide smile.

"I'm aimin' to ride that hoss some day," he said softly.

The remark was greeted with riotous derision. Not a man in the room but had made the same boast, either to himself or to his fellow ropers. One and all they had had their try, to return empty-handed. It was to be expected, of course, that Harmonica would have his fling. But they hoped against hope that he would listen to reason and profit by their experience.

"You let that wild animile alone," growled Seven-up Haskins. "There's a flock of smart *hombres* 've tried to bring him in, and there ain't none of 'em's done it yet. They raves when they goes out, but they comes in plumb silent—from which I

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opines they learns a lot 'bout wild hosses in gen'ral. The same bein' stated for yore benefit."

"Kerrect as ——," interpolated Johnnie Murray. "We has all fell and fell hard. You know there ain't nothin' so blamed attractive to a sky-pilot as a four-way rapscallion, pickled in forty-rod, hittin' the velvet to the mourner's bench."

"Don't you call me no sky-pilot, you bandy-legged maverick," drawled Harmonica. "I don't wonder you got nowhere. You can't ride. You hangs on like a flock of sheep-shears trainin' for a shindig, and for judgment you uses the intelligence of a herd of loco muleys huntin' for water. It'll be a whole lot differ'nt when I goes after him, believe me."

Johnnie Murray glared at him in disgust.

"Lawdy! Lawdy! Ain't he the retirin' person?" he purred. "He don't toot his horn none, he don't. He just nachully blows the muzzle clean off!"

He dodged a boot which Harmonica hurled at him and rolled into his bunk. The others followed suit with much banter and sarcasm. Harmonica, however, was impervious to it all, and, long after the rest had dropped into a healthy slumber, he lay staring at the dim outlines of the bunkhouse rafters, his mind out across the mesa where the rolling dunes that spread for miles like a great petrified sea were marked with the tracks of a great black stallion.

IT LACKED but a few days to the end of the Summer solstice when the Hashknife outfit learned just how deep an impression had been made upon Harmonica Davis by the stories of the Hellion. It was a breathless kind of day, common to that latitude, when the sun's rays, as Seven-up Haskins expressed it, "hit the grit and bounced," and the air, filled with fine desert dust, gritted in the lungs.

The outfit lay sprawled in the shade of the ranch-house in varied attitudes of comfortless unrest, alternately mopping the perspiration from their faces and cursing the weather in deadly malignant and picturesque terms. Harmonica Davis, his back against a fence-post, was braiding a pair of ropes together and humming a disconnected tune. Seven-up lay at his feet, sucking idly at a soggy cigaret and watching him through half-closed lids.

"Hey, *hombre*," he challenged after a bit. "What's the ijea in double-hitchin' them ropes together?"

Harmonica plaited a strand of horsehair into a slender cable and held it up against the light for better inspection.

"It's like this," he replied. "In the sem'nary I attended when I was a giddy young lady, they taught me to use a long rope in handlin' wild hosses. They opined as how a long rope was better than a short one."

He resumed the broken thread of his tune without looking up. The eyes of his fellow ropers met. Johnnie Murray rose on one elbow for a better view of the speaker.

"Did you say 'wild hoss'?" the foreman inquired politely.

"You got me," retorted Harmonica pleasantly. "That's funny, it is—I never knew a jackass yet that didn't have trouble with his ears. Must be terr'ble to be in that condition."

He licked the end of a hair and tucked it into place. The foreman snorted and dropped back to his original position. A silence fell on the circle, broken only by Harmonica's humming. Finally Seven-up ventured a question.

"You know the Hellion's gone south come three weeks, don't you?" he demanded.

Harmonica worked the end of a strand through a loop and made a knot in it.

"Some persons might think so," he replied easily. "Me—I got diff'rent ijeas."

"Well, let's have a few of 'em if they're free of the askin'," growled Seven-up.

"Free as air. The Hellion come through Poncho Gap 'bout midnight last night. He was goin' north at the time, and the way he was hittin' the trail he'd ought to be a long ways from south 'bout now."

Seven-up stared at the other for a minute. Then he, like the foreman, dropped back and pulled his hat over the bridge of his nose. Johnnie Murray kicked the ranch-house wall viciously and bit off a chew of tobacco with unconcealed venom.

"How long's this been goin' on?" he demanded when he worked the "quid" to a point where conversation became possible.

"What goin' on?" Harmonica's tone was one of injured innocence.

"You know what I mean—this layin' on your belly out in the mesquite spy-eyein' that fool cayuse?"

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Harmonica smiled and hummed another bar of his song.

"Lemme see," he calculated. "What year is this?"

The thoroughly exasperated foreman sat up and, regardless of the heat, shook a lean and sinewy forefinger under Harmonica's nose.

"You let that *caballo* alone!" he bellowed. "You hear me? You let him entire and plumb be. Brandin's comin', and I ain't aimin' to have you rampsin' off like a sick llama full of loco-weed. You half-witted hound, you make me weary. There ain't a roper on this side of Juarez that ain't wasted all kinds of time stalkin' that Hellion over two States. Every blamed one of 'em was a heap sight smarter than you'll ever be, and at that it don't teach you nothin'. Holy Mike! You talk like a baby *bobo!*"

He hurled the Mexican term for idiot with explosive violence. Harmonica chuckled.

"I'll tell you, Johnnie," he said. "There's some people that's just nachully made for the comp'ny of cows and heifers. Speakin' personal, I prefers intelligence myself. The first kind makes elegant foremen and such, and nachully I picks out hosses as bein' more to my style of savvey. You wouldn't cheat me out of a chance to improve my mind by a change of scenery just because you had coyot' ancestors, would you?"

The foreman gave Harmonica a wrathful look, dusted himself off and went inside. The outfit could hear him kicking chairs and tinware around. Seven-up shook his head.

"You hadn't ought to get Johnnie all riled up like that," he protested. "He ain't got over ol' 'Bol' Brady yet."

Several heads nodded. Harmonica looked up.

"What happened to Bol?" he asked.

"He was the last roper that went after that spawn of the devil. Ol' Bol' was a humdinger on wheels when it came to throwin' a brand on somethin' wild. Somewhere out yonder where the mesa slopes off into trouble, he got in the quicksand tryin' to hitch the Hellion to his rope. We had the devil's own time gettin' him out."

It was plain that Seven-up found the recollection anything but pleasant. He went on.

"You see, Johnnie and Bol was pals, and Johnnie seen him when we brung him in. Things like that ain't nice to look at—not when it's yore pal and you've roped and chowed and fought through two years of life together. That's what's the matter with him now." He jerked a finger toward the ranch-house. "Johnnie's makin' a bluff 'bout needin' you for brandin'. It's Bol' that sticks in his crop; that's all."

"Hum-m-m!" There was no banter in Harmonica's tone. "So that's it—the ol' bald-headed pirate." He straightened the kinks out of his hat and clamped it over one ear. "Funny," he remarked, "how sentimental ol' men gets, ain't it?"

Seven-up glared at him in speechless indignation. Harmonica caught the other's malevolent glance.

"I'll tell you, son," he said suddenly. "I ain't aimin' to bronco-bust the Hellion none. I'm just aimin' to ride out and get acquainted with him—that's all."

Seven-up's wrath boiled over.

"Goin' right up and kiss him on the front tooth, now ain't you?" There was a world of sarcasm in his voice.

"Nope," replied Harmonica with insulting deliberation. "I ain't got yore winnin' ways with animiles."

A laugh rippled around the circle, and with it Harmonica's mood suddenly changed. He whirled with unexpected seriousness.

"Look here, you mavericks," he rasped. "The trouble with you and Johnnie Murray and the rest of you is that you ain't got any imagination. Eatin' chuck off of Dutch ovens and associatin' with longhorns has kinda hide-wore you so yore ijeas sticks through like a saddle callous. That black *caballo* is O. K. He's just like the rest of us. He ain't had a chance to prove nothin' but the deviltry in him. That's why he's got such a black eye with you thick-headed hoss-wranglers."

"What's hoss-wranglin' got to do with imagination?" demanded Seven-up darkly.

"A powerful lot. You might 've been a Jesse James or a hymn-singin' revivalist if you'd been raised diff'rent. Look at me! The ol' man wanted to make a Baptist out of me, but I just nachully couldn't stand the water. It kind of went ag'in' my nature. So I ups and becomes a cowpunch, the bathin' not bein' so plumb frequent and gen'ous. An' I been happy

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ever since. If the ol' man had 've had his way, I might have growed to be Pres'dent instead of hustlin' muleys for a livin', and the Hellion might have been a bobtailed angel-face pullin' a hack instead of an ornery devil if his paw and maw had taught him manners."

"My grandmother's left hind foot!" ejaculated Seven-up in supreme disgust.

He yanked his hat over his eyes to shut out the other's mocking face and went to sleep.

THE following morning before the outfit had stirred into action, Harmonica Davis slipped out of the bunk-house, saddled Pete, his little pinto pony, and rode off toward the distant hills, just beginning to color with the orange and pink and sapphire of early morning. The air was fragrantly fresh with the odor of sage and chaparral, and, as he rode along, Harmonica sang blithely to his horse and slapped it affectionately on the neck.

Louie Gam, the Chinese cook, saw him go but kept his observation to himself. When the others missed their troubadour and his sunrise serenade, Gam vouchsafed no information. Only Johnnie Murray caught a hidden gleam in his eye and, backing him up against the chow-house, demanded information.

"Come on, you highbinder," he growled, thumping the cook against the wall of the cook-house with a great display of assumed violence. "Where's Harmonica?"

The Chinese grinned amiably.

"Him go catchum fish," he retorted cheerfully with his usual disregard for the ruth.

The foreman broke into a roar of aughter.

"How much did he give you to say that?" e demanded.

"Two dollah hop," replied Gam, edging way.

As this was the largest amount which ne cook could accomplish in English, the oreman let it go at that, fully understanding that Gam had no intention of elling anything he knew to anybody hatsoever.

While his fellow ropers speculated on s absence, Harmonica was jogging eadily southward to Chiquita Valley. His bjective was a certain glade in the center which he had long before noticed a cottonwood tree. Time was when this tree had been the official spot for the summary and *ex-parte* disposition of cattle-rustlers. Gaunt, bleached and alone in its misery, it was shunned by Mexicans and Indians alike on account of its sinister history.

An hour's riding brought him to the spot he sought. Riding into the glade, he uncoiled his saddle rope and looped one end around the base of the tree. Then, walking his pony some distance away, he snubbed the other end over his saddle-horn, permitting the slack to trail on the ground between the tree and the pony. This done, he settled himself firmly on his horse's back, gave a sudden shrill whistle and flecked the pony with his quirt on the inside flank. The pony promptly jumped sidewise until brought up by the rope coming taut against the cottonwood stump.

Harmonica immediately slackened the rope and rode his animal back to the starting-point. Again and again he repeated the experiment, with infinite patience, until the pony needed only the shrill sound of the whistle to set him into motion. This achieved, his rider dismounted and essayed the same results on foot, leaving the pony to follow his own devices with only a whistle to guide him. The result brought a burst of approval from him.

"Gosh A'mighty, li'l' hoss," he said, "you sure have got a heap of savvey, the which makes common punchers look like left-overs alongside."

Louie Gam was jangling the noon triangle by the ranch-house pump when Harmonica rode into the yard on his lathering pinto. The outfit was washing up for dinner. In the animal corral a lazy steer dozed in the sun. Harmonica slipped to the ground, strolled to a rick and pitched a forkful of hay into the center of the corral. Then he uncoiled his rope, dropped a loop over the hay and fastened the other end to the horn of his saddle. After which he mounted the corral fence and waited.

"What's that maverick layin' out to do now?" queried one puncher of another, wiping the soap out of his eyes for a better view.

"Reckon he's doin' what the Chink said—fishin' and usin' hay for bait," replied another.

The steer raised his head and sniffed

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the air. After a bit he strolled over to the hay and began to nose it with short upward jerks of his head. His four feet came inside the rope loop laid invitingly around the pile. As he reached out to nibble at a waving straw, Harmonica straightened suddenly and gave a shrill whistle.

At the sound the pony came to life with electrical suddenness. There was a quick confusing blur as he sprang sidewise. The rope came up out of the dust with a puff like the crack of a machine-gun and locked around the steer's feet like a steel cable. The animal smashed to the ground with a jar that knocked the breath out of him.

Harmonica slid from the rail and unleashed both horse and steer. The latter scrambled to his feet and made off wildly to the far corner of the corral. Seven-up turned on Johnnie Murray.

"I never thought I'd see the day a cayuse'd do his own ropin' the whiles a lot of hones' cow-punches stands by wipin' their faces. The which looks to me like a bunch of gents will be lookin' for jobs when hosses gets eddicated."

When the outfit lined up for dinner, ranging themselves within "spud-spearin'" distance of the table, "Snake" Wilson, one of the older punchers, presumed on his standing to ask the question uppermost in the minds of all.

"What you got ag'in' that splotch-faced shorthorn out yonder?" he asked as a feeler.

Harmonica slid a generous helping of Louie Gam's best mulligan on to his plate and moved the sugar-bowl within ladle-range.

"Nothin'," he retorted with his usual aggravating calm, "except he's all-fired cur'ous."

"Shucks," replied Snake unabashed. "There ain't no harm bein' cur'ous."

"Nope, there ain't," Harmonica agreed, balancing a potato on the flat of his knife with the skill born of long practise. "But them that is takes their own chances of surprizes layin' out in the open."

Snake growled an inaudible retort and retreated from the caustic focus of Harmonica's tongue. The rest of the outfit tittered openly. It was apparent that every man at the table was just as anxious as Snake Wilson to solve the mystery of the pinto's odd behavior.

III

IT WAS a week later when Harmonica Davis set out in earnest on his quest for the Hellion. With an extra food ration in his saddle-bag, his new-braided rope and a pair of grass hobbles which he had borrowed from Johnnie Murray, he left in the early morning, as many another had gone before him. The boys crowded around and cursed him for being various kinds of a fool, at the same time wishing him luck with the open-hearted generosity of the range in his quest for the Holy Grail of the cow-country's greatest desire. Silently they stood on the ranch-house veranda and watched him top the crest of the distant hills and disappear from view.

"Dog-gone him," growled Seven-up. "I feel as blue as if the darned fool was goin' to get married."

"Do him good," rasped the foreman, sourly. "Does any ijit good to get trimmed once in a while."

"That so?" jeered Snake Wilson. "You're talkin' fine now, you are, but you was palaverin' some diff'rent a while back."

"How so?"

"Tellin' Harm not to pull a knife on the Hellion."

"Well, what of it? You never saw the time an ace wasn't good legal tender when the playin' was thin, did you?"

"You chicken-livered coyot'," retorted Snake. "You got as much hard rock in yore make-up as a cow has whiskers. Right now you'd like to see Harm come larrupin' back with the Hellion just so's you could go bustin' round Le Farge's tellin' what a Hashknife rider could do, an' you know it."

The foreman made a wild swing with a pair of chaps he was carrying, but his tormentor ducked out of reach. Seven-up cut in.

"Cut it out, you mavericks," he said. "What is this here knife talk? I heard it before. Waldo Simms of the Shoe-Bar poured it into me one night, only, him bein' drunk at the time, I discounted some."

Johnnie Murray lit a cigaret.

"There ain't much to tell," he replied. "Every rider in ten counties knows the yarn. When this here Hellion was calf-high with his hock-hairs trailin' in the dust.

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a wrangler named Sonntag, a sort of half-breed Mex that worked for the Hundred and One, breezed in and tied to the Hashknife. He had a run-in with the Hellion's maw, she bein' a she reptile with a lot of bad habits—the which she must have been fed on cactus milk when she was a filly, the way the pricklers done stuck out on her disposition. Between the two of 'em it was pretty nigh a stand-off, only Sonntag, bein' human, was supposed to have sense.

"Come one day the mare bit him; I don't know what for, an' it don't make no diff'rence. Sonntag, bein' part Mex, as I said, ups and cuts her throat with his trimmin'-knife. The Hellion was standin' by—you know how a colt is, always foolin' round like a kid—an' they tell me, when he seen that mare laid out in the dust bleedin' to death and the greaser standin' over her, he went plumb loco. He bellered so they done heard him over to McIntosh's chuck-wagon on Pablo Flat."

"Scared, huh?"

"Scared? Not by a blamed sight. Just mad, clean, fightin' mad. They had to rope him and hog-tie him for a whole day. He churned up more froth than a milk-shake. Every time Sonntag walked across the corral, the Hellion'd start screamin' to get at him, helpless as he was. Punchers that have wrangled hosses all their lives told me they never seen anything like it.

"After a while the whole outfit began to kinda get the Hellion's view-point. So they leads Sonntag to one side, quiet-like, and opined as how the ol' man would be sore over losin' the mare and liable to start rampsin' round with a sawed-off like he done with Pete Porter. Sonntag sees how the land lay and takes the tip and treks. Punchers is a raw lot, but his kind was too strong for anybody's stomach."

"You said it," declared Seven-up. "There's too blamed many Sonntags in the world, anyhow."

"The which this here ijit Harmonica makes up for some strong," added the foreman with emphasis, which was as near as he ever came to an expression of sentiment.

The cold, shivery dawn of the next day found the Hashknife outfit plunged into its late year *rodeo*, and for several days thereafter the crew was busy gathering stubborn steers and cows and wild-eyed calves from brush-grown ravines, creek-beds and arroyos. It was not until the end of the week, when the bulk of the herd was safely penned within wire fences, that the name of Harmonica Davis came up again.

"Bet ol' Harm would like a mess of chuck steak and a couple of sody-biscuits," commented Snake Wilson.

They were grouped around the fire, pulling at their pipes and cigarets in contented weariness.

"Wonder how he's makin' it out yonder?" speculated Seven-up.

"I'll bet he ain't makin' it." It was the foreman's voice that broke in.

"You're takin' one elegant chance of losin' yore *dinero*," retorted Seven-up. "This Harm person ain't no mutt at handlin' animiles."

"He's got somethin' up his sleeve, all right," chimed in another roper.

Johnnie Murray snorted.

"You make me laugh." His tone was derisive. "Didn't we all have somethin' up our sleeves when we expedites out into the perspective to pass out the glad hand? How 'bout Hank Chesman? All 'iled up with slick ijeas, he was. An' ol' Pete Walker! My eye! Pete was goin' to have that black devil jumpin' through a rope in two shakes of a goat's tail. Took along a can of secrate to rub on the Hellion's knees, he was that sure he was goin' to get corns from knucklin' to him. He'd fixed all the bad ones in the circus, he had. He'd show a wild hoss who was runnin' the mesa, he would. An' what happened? Fell off a cliff and nearly broke his neck, didn't he?"

" 'Tweren't the Hellion's fault," Seven-up defended.

"That's just it. The Hellion never does nothin'. But somehow every *hombre* that tries to get him has plumb funny and peeculiar accidents happen to him. Ever notice that?"

"All the same, I bet Harm gets that hoss," persisted Seven-up.

Johnnie Murray considered.

"What says so?" he asked after a bit.

"Drinks for the bunch—and three weeks to do it in!"

The foreman rose and walked to the chuck-wagon. By the light of the fire he chalked the bet on the tail-board:

No Hellion by Sept. 8—six all around Le Farge's—Seven-up per JM.

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It was two days later when Harmonica was mentioned again. The round-up tallies had been finished and the herds segregated for different purposes. The sun was just dipping a burnished tip into the mystic sapphire of the hills when Seven-up touched Johnnie Murray on the arm as they were bedding their horses for the night.

"What do you reckon's happened to Harmonica?" he asked.

The foreman leaned on his pitchfork and stared off toward the sinking ball of the sun.

"I been wonderin' that all day." There was a note of uneasiness in his voice.

"How'd it be if I kinda larruped out that way tomorrow mornin' and look round?" Seven-up spoke casually.

The foreman shifted his gaze to meet that of his roper. "Out that way" was a good sixty miles over ground that was considered the worst in the country. In the aggregate it represented a day and a night of travel through heavy sand, matted mesquite and stunted chaparral, in the blinding heat that habitually shut down at that season of the year in a stifling blanket, carrying the dust of countless herds in opalescent suspension. Only an hour before he had heard Seven-up announce that he was "dog-tired," and now he was willing to undergo that grilling ordeal—for Harmonica.

"All right," said the foreman briefly. "You better take my hoss. He's the best traveler in the outfit."

There was a sudden tightening of his mouth that did not escape Seven-up. The latter, however, merely nodded and turned away. It was typical of the cow-country that, while each sensed the other's thoughts, neither attempted to put them into words.

IV

MILLER CUT is a sheer gash sliced through the upper gorges of the Black Butte country. Viewed laterally, it appears as a black chasm running from end to end across the unbroken surface of the butte itself, like the cleavage from a giant ax. In the world's younger days a stream had started wearing down through the limestone table. During succeeding ages it kept at the task, the channel narrowing as the harder substrata were reached until, as the Rio Dolorosa—the sorrowful river—it trickled along the bed of a gloomy chasm, hundreds of feet below its original level.

Above the cut spread the Mesa Perdita and beyond it the outer fringe of the desert—a withered sea of endless, rolling dunes. In the distance on clear days the granite outcrops of a sister State, gnarled with age, showed faintly against the sky-line. Everything within it, about it and around it reflected the primitive and uncontrolled. The very rocks of igneous blackness that lined its bottom registered Pliocene rebellion. In the Winter, as if in defiance to the opposition it encountered, a meager, muddy stream meandered along the depths, to dry during the Summer into sporadic water-holes, where herds of wild cattle and horses plunged in from the iridescent mists of the distances to slake their thirst.

On the fifth day following his departure from the Hashknife Rancho, Harmonica Davis rode into the upper end of Miller Cut. For three of those five days, he had lain on the upper edge of the butte, where he commanded a view of the valleys beneath, and studied the panoramic landscape around him. He had been rewarded for those hours of aching muscles by a sight of the Hellion—his first view of the animal—at the head of a band of fine-looking animals, headed out of the mouth of the cut.

Tail out, mane flying, he was a magnificent figure of a horse, and Harmonica, hardened puncher that he was, felt a thrill of excitement surge through him as he realized that many of the tales he had heard of the stallion were, for the most part, true and that he had discovered what no other cattleman on the range knew—the hiding-place of the wild stallion. It was a matter of common knowledge that Miller Cut was shunned by the majority of cowpunchers. There was an old Mexican superstition that told of eery happenings in the valley—of riders who ventured too close to the top and dropped from sight as if by magic—and of cattle that faded mysteriously from view.

Riding through the upper opening of the gorge, Harmonica saw in the morning light the scientific reason for it all in the masses of crumbling shale that formed a risky foothold for anything that ventured too close to the edge. Stray cattle without number had met a similar fate, as the numbers of bleached bones that lined the

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bed of the valley bore mute testimony. In a way, Harmonica was disappointed at the topography of Miller Cut. He had hoped for an open roping-ground where he could find anchorage for his high-heeled boots and play for his rope. He wanted to come face to face with the animal, study him as a trained fighter studies his opponent.

There was a certain amount of psychology bound up in Harmonica's desire. It was not alone that he wanted to trap and subdue a royal thing in his own hillside fastness. But he had long since marked the Hellion as a fine-grained product, misdirected through circumstances, and fully capable of being turned into a useful adjunct to the cattle business. In this Harmonica took issue with his fellow ropers, who believed that force could be pitted against cunning in the handling of an animal of the Hellion's acute intelligence.

Harmonica knew that a cow-pony, of all animals in the world, was the happiest through accomplishment. And he reasoned that the stallion, likewise, would be at his best when taught the wonder ways of service. He had expressed his sentiments to his pinto one night high up on the tableland as they kept their lonely vigil.

"You know, paint," he said, "the bigger Hellion he's been actin' up, the bigger savvey he's gonna have when he gets pointed right. Me and you is goin' to show Johnnie Murray and some of them other thick-headed punchers that we knows nosses from the tail-feathers up."

Once inside the cut, Harmonica took tock of his surroundings. The entrance o the valley was blocked by two huge ranite blocks that at some prehistoric high-vater period had broken loose from high p on the side of the slope, to come crashing own the slant. Small boulders had fallen n behind as landslide after landslide of osened material poured down the incline, radually building up a natural breastwork nat left a narrow opening just wide enough o accommodate four riders abreast.

Pulling rein within the overhanging illars of the gateway, Harmonica looked ver the dark and dismal interior of the alley, where only the slant light of the orning hung over the gloomy shadows for brief space like the poised wand of a njuror. At his feet, innumerable tracks oing and coming told the secret of the ng-hidden rendezvous into which the missing herds of the Mesa Perdita fled to safety when pursuit became too close. An hour later he had made a complete circuit of the valley and had returned to the gateway.

At the lower end the cut ended against a granite wall like a blind alley, the only exit or entrance being through the jaws of the granite columns at the upper end. Studying the valley from end to end, Harmonica realized that Nature had constructed for him a wonderful trap, by far more effective than anything he could have devised. He leaned over and patted his pony on the neck.

"Li'l' hoss," he said, "me and you's goin' to show them punchers stuff, we is."

The sun was just dipping below the flatness of the outside world, and the shadows in Miller Cut had turned to sable garments flung across the crouching shoulders of the mountains when Harmonica Davis set about preparations for his capture of the Hellion. His first act was to hobble his pinto near one of the granite blocks, inside the valley's entrance, in such a manner that he would not be seen by anything coming through the portals. Then he uncoiled the double-length rope on which he had spent so many weary hours. Directly in front of the gateway he spread it out in a great loop. Then with the toe of his boot he kicked sand and gravel over it until even an Indian would not have suspected its presence.

The other end of the rope he snubbed to his saddle-horn. With minute care he examined every inch of it to see that it lay exactly where he desired. Then, nose-hobbling his mount so that it could not nicker, he wrapped himself in a blanket and lay down at the pony's head to wait. He craved a cigaret and the refreshing stimulation of a flapjack fried over a mesquite-fire, but he dared not indulge either craving, lest the unaccustomed odors hang too long suspended in the quiet air about him.

The intense silence of the valley was uncanny. All his life he had been accustomed to sleeping in the open where he could hear the sounds of crawling things around him. The burring of insects, the scratching of tiny desert folk as they dragged their sun-hardened bodies over the rocks, were as a lullaby to him. But in the cut there was only the sound of the pinto's

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teeth as he ground his bit between restless jaws or jerked impatiently at his hobbles.

PRESENTLY a faint lightening of the sky just visible in the star-studded strip overhead announced the arrival of the desert moon. At first the upper edges of the cañon stood out in penciled lines of silver. Then a boulder here and there bloomed out under the creeping rays like a huge night-flower. After a bit the moonlight touched the far side of the cliff and began to creep downward, sketching in broad light and shade the massive beauty of the chasm around him.

It was tremendously lonely in its magnificence, with a terrible grandeur such as must have impressed the first man alone for the first time amid his world of new things. Harmonica felt a dim desire to put a hand on either chasm-wall, press it backward and step out into the immensity of space.

The light which reflected from the granite wall above him was sufficient for him to read his watch. Midnight. The Hellion should be coming shortly now. Harmonica changed his position, conscious that his nerves were steady and his mental processes coordinately attuned for the task ahead. Analyzing his feelings, he found that he had few doubts about his ability to carry out to a successful conclusion this big dream of his life.

Just how far he would be able to carry out his further plan of taming the animal, having captured it, he could not predicate. He realized that there was a little uncertainty here, but the doubt he soon waved away as due to the talk which had been poured into his ears back on the ranch during the early days of his interest.

The pinto caught the sound first! Harmonica, his back against the gateway, traveling the star-path of his dreams, became suddenly conscious that the animal had thrown up his head and was listening. Instantly alert, he held himself tensely, but there was nothing in the way of even the slightest sound to register on his ears. He laid his head flat against a granite flag imbedded in the ground. Dimly he caught it at first and then more clearly—a vague distant rumble. Gradually, as the minutes passed, the rumble swelled to a stentorian purr.

Steadily it came on. Harmonica sprang to his feet, galvanized into action. He unleashed his pony's hobbles, talking to him in quick, eager whispers, like a captain imposing last quick orders before a new kind of a surprize attack. A second rope hung from the saddle-strap. This he unfastened and coiled over his arm, with the running loop on the end that every cowboy on the range can make, even in his sleep. Running back a short distance from the opening of the portal, he dropped down in a head—a motionless blot in the moonlight. A murmured word steadied his pony, who was pawing the sand now and tossing his head in growing nervousness.

The sound of the oncoming band had become a roar now. They were close to the mouth of the cut. Scores of feet, swinging in rhythm over the hardened gravel bed, reverberated in rising overtones against the cañon walls. Straining his eyes through the gloom of the entrance, Harmonica could make them out—a compact, dark mass, traveling in close formation and at the rate of an express-train. He tried to identify the Hellion, but at that distance the moonlight flattened all details, and he could not pick him out from the rest.

In through the great portals they flashed, heads up, tails flying like cavalry pennants. Behind them the dust from their hammering hoofs rose in the moonlight—a filmy cloud—shutting out all background and leaving them centered in its indistinct drapery. With no apparent diminution in their speed, they raced through the entrance. Those in front crowded the ones behind as the opening narrowed until they were coming almost single file. Harmonica took a quick look at his pony. The animal was trembling violently, his neck craned backward and his wide eyes fixed on the oncoming band. Harmonica realized that the test of his long hours of patience was to come now—quickly.

Suddenly the great figure of a horse loomed ahead of the others in the portal's mouth. Harmonica caught only an instant's glimpse of the animal. Its chest was lathered with foam. The whites of its eyes glistened in the moonlight. Like a great barbarian figure at the head of some conquering horde he came—regal, terrible—the Hellion and his brood. With lightning realization Harmonica keyed himself to

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sudden concentration and whistled the shrill call he had taught his pony.

Even as the call rang out, Harmonica realized that the sound was drowned under the deafening roar of those hoofs. The realization drove him heart-sick. It was the one point upon which he had not figured. In a frenzy of self-excoriation he sprang to his feet and raised his arm for a chance throw with the rope he carried, and in that second something happened.

The pinto had been growing more and more excited. As the great stallion thundered through the portals, he whirled toward the herd. Like a garment, the training of years fell away from him. The call of the wild was in his blood again. Ages behind him his ancestors had swung through gorges like this with their herds. There was the roar of many feet in his ears—the moonlight—the smell of animals—and freedom!

He threw up his head with a quick jerk that broke his nose-strap. A shrill clamorous call broke from him. Bunching his feet under him, as the Hellion flashed in, he pivoted—and was away up the valley ahead of the rest, the rope trailing from the saddle-horn. Harmonica caught a quick glimpse of him as he went by—just as the loop came up out of the portal's mouth and swung suddenly taut.

The great stallion stumbled, caught himself, stumbled again, his feet enmeshed in the loop—and went down. The rest of the herd smashed ahead, pitched over him and piled up. Mare after mare crashed into the barrier of flesh—it became a whirlpool of threshing feet and legs. Those behind, unaware of the disaster, crowded on. From an open gateway it turned to a screaming shambles. Some were trampled and kicked to death. Others were crushed beneath the weight and momentum of the ones behind. Finally the rushing current spent itself within the narrow confines—all but the awful sounds. Then came the reflex. The injured fought to become disentangled. They fought and struggled. Screams that were almost human in their intensity filled the gorge. The few that managed to extricate themselves went careening against rocks and boulders. Some staggered to their feet only to trip and go down in the heap again. Some distance away the pinto, whose sudden flight had precipitated the awful happening, lay panting on the sand, unhurt, where the Hellion's fall had thrown him. And somewhere underneath that writhing, moaning heap—the Hellion!

It seemed an epoch of time to Harmonica before the cries quieted down. The injured mares were too badly hurt to make much protest and floundered until exhausted. Occasionally one suffering more than the rest would sink its teeth in another lying near it. The cries would break out again. Occasionally one would stagger away on a broken leg and go down—the sight sickened Harmonica.

He ran to his prostrate pony and slipped his Winchester from its scabbard. At least he could end the misery of a few. They stood out clear and sharp in the moonlight—the crack of the rifle as he fired again and again set the echoes to rocking. But for that awful heap he could do nothing—until dawn. So he sat there beside them—waiting for the light. His hands shook as he rolled a cigaret. After all, it had been his own doing!

DAWN at last. The task was a new one—roping half-alive animals, pulling them out of the heap by main strength—he and the pinto. Often he had to use his rifle—finally the Hellion! Only an animal of the stallion's magnificent build could have withstood the weight of those bodies and the threshing hoofs. He was scarred and bruised and considerably dazed—but the fight was still in him. Harmonica loved him for that.

Cautiously he hobbled him. Later he led him out of the valley, limping but still resisting. It was manifest that he wanted to get away from the broken herd, spread grotesquely upon the sand. But his spirit was not diminished. Only when the fresh air struck his nostrils did he seem to realize his captivity.

Harmonica realized the necessity for action before the animal recuperated. He kept the rope on his feet—snubbed to the pinto—and advanced on foot for a "hind-tie" that would render him helpless. The Hellion sensed his approach, reared back and snapped his hobbles. Harmonica smiled. This was going to be a real contest, after all. He came on, the Hellion feinting with his front feet and backing away.

As Harmonica approached, he rose on

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his hind feet and struck out viciously—he looked mountains high. The pinto brought him back to earth with a nasty jerk. The Hellion bared his teeth and waited—and still Harmonica came on—slowly.

The steady advance began to worry him. Abruptly he veered and began to trot in a circle, tossing his head. Harmonica knew the trick—one that has cost many a cowboy his life. It is the acme of animal cunning, with the most innocent of beginnings.

With every nerve in his body alert, Harmonica stood motionless. The Hellion raced around the circumference of a short circle, the pinto holding the center and turning with him. Each time as the rope approached him, Harmonica dodged to avoid it. Again and again the stallion circled, keeping the rope taut, and then—almost too quick for the eye, he whirled and bore in like a black streak of death.

Quick as he was, Harmonica was quicker. As the spinning, slashing hoofs whirled toward him, he flattened suddenly to the ground—he felt them pass within narrow inches of his head. From the ground he flung up his rope as the animal went over him—a slow, insidious, crawling thing that locked firmly around the Hellion's forefeet. As the Hellion went past, Harmonica sat upright, anchored his heavy boots in the ground and brought the weight of his body against the tightening rope. The tug caught the Hellion in mid-air, and he struck the ground with an impact that knocked the breath out of him and gave the pinto time to gather up the slack in his own rope.

Panting violently, the Hellion sprang to his feet, only to be thrown again and with greater force. Again and again he came up, Harmonica playing him like a trout. The restraint and opposition he met at every angle began to worry the animal. He twisted and writhed, seeking to escape from ropes that seemed to be everywhere. The pinto with adroit intelligence kept out of range until Harmonica maneuvered the Hellion between himself and the pony. Then, with the cards all stacked in his favor, he settled down in grim earnest to finish the task.

It was noon when the job was finally ended—when the Hellion, broken and mastered, was thrown for the last time and stayed on the ground, completely exhausted. Harmonica was nearly as weary, and the pinto was lathering from head to foot and plainly at the end of his endurance. Harmonica's hat was gone. His face was streaked with mud where the perspiration had made rivulets through the dirt, and the left sleeve of his shirt was ripped off at the shoulder. But he had won! It was not he that had quit—it had been the Hellion. In his moment of triumph he looked over at his pony, dirty, weary, but still ready to carry on the fight and alive with nerve-strung excitement.

"Li'l' paint," he said, and his voice was cracked from thirst, "you're a gent, you are—clean to yore heels. You stuck to me all the way through. Gosh A'mighty, if I don't nachully feed you oats for the rest of yore life, I'm a ring-tailed coyot'." It was the biggest reward for a cow-pony of which he could, at that moment, think.

The matter of the Hellion's taming was not a matter of hours or of days. Therein Harmonica's skill as a roper met with a signal test. Where most punchers would have endeavored to saddle and break the stallion all at one time, Harmonica went deeper into basic understandings, and he differentiated the functions. Without being troubled with the refinements and complexities of psychology, he analyzed it as plain "bad judgment" to hurry matters with an animal of the Hellion's type.

Harmonica's concepts were fundamentally simple in all he undertook. Many of the reasons for the things he did he could have explained to his fellow punchers had he so desired, as he had explained them many times to the desert stars. It suited, however, the whimsical caprice of his nature to let them believe that it was the lure of the hunt and the excitement of a fight which had lured him on, instead of the development of an intention—founded days before in the ranch-house shade—to give the great, black desert renegade a chance to be something besides the miscreant that his name indicated.

From his arrival in the Mojave country, Harmonica had been known as a desert troubadour. He had derived his name from his one boon companion, the mouth-organ without which he was never known to be. It was his one inspiration, his perpetual solace, his everlasting panacea. He spent the lonely nights on stock patrol,

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one leg looped over his saddle-horn, cupping it between chilled fingers, playing his dreams and memories into it until the purple fingers of the dawn plucked the shadows from the eternal hills.

Harmonica's repertoire was not extensive. "Turkey in the Straw" was his favorite. "Two Little Girls in Blue" came next in order of popularity, while the "Stars and Stripes Forever"—played without sharps and flats, regardless of the author's feelings on the subject—held third but honored favor. On occasions of special stress he would reach across ready-made restoratives into the creative, his effects dealing in double and triple "tongueing," "buzzard bass" and other fancy touches. Regardless of what he essayed, "li'l' tin-teeth" had never failed of comfort or cheer when they were needed most.

Being Harmonica, he had never failed to notice the effect of his selections upon the animals of the range. Sad-faced cows would regard him thoughtfully over corral fences. Steers would face right-about like a regiment of solemn-eyed Scandinavians and stare at him, chewing their cuds meditatively, while Johnnie Murray's little Airedale terrier would sidle close to him and with its chin on his dusty boot give utterance to dolorous chromatic moans.

Even the ranch-house parrot, hanging upside down in its cage, would cock one eye cannily at the rafters and cease his stream of vituperative brevities. And, although he usually remarked at the close of the concert that "this is a —— of a life," the Hashknife outfit always maintained that he was expressing appreciation within the limits of a somewhat restricted vocabulary.

Some thought of this had been in the back of Harmonica's head since the day he determined that he would capture the Hellion. Now, sitting cross-legged on the sand before the hobbled and sullen stallion, with a "dough-dab" toasting over a mesquite-fire, the idea returned with clear-cut insistence. Flipping the "dab" over on its tender side, he suddenly pulled his mouth-organ from his shirt pocket, where it still remained intact. While the stallion looked on with baleful and wholly unfriendly mood, he cuddled "li'l' tin-teeth" in his hands, dropped his elbows on his knees and softly, very softly, began the opening bars of "Turkey in the Straw."

V

WHEN Seven-up Haskins announced casually in the Hashknife bunk-house, following his talk with the foreman, that he was going out on the morrow to look for Harmonica Davis, the suggestion met with instant and hearty approval. While deriding the probability that any accident had befallen their troubadour-roper, the boys were considerably worried over his protracted absence. The suggestion gave them a chance for expression.

"It ain't that anybody thinks Harm can't take care of hisself," a lanky roper justified, "but accidents happen, as the ol' woman said when she fell out of a window and broke her neck, the which it won't do no harm to take a pasear out thataway——"

He broke off lamely. The others nodded approval.

"Tell you, Seven-up," suggested another. "You better take along some snake-bite. A shot of hootch comes in mighty handy sometimes."

"An' some of doc's first-aid stuff," added another. "He might 've broke a couple of laigs—or somethin'."

"An' a couple of canteens or so." This from a third.

Seven-up whirled belligerently.

"Say, you mavericks," he said. "What do you think I am, a blamed pack-mule?"

"We ain't sure," retorted Locomotive Jones. "We ain't never looked you in the face."

Seven-up was about to make personal retort when a roper near the door held up his hand for silence. The thud of hoofs on the rancho roadway was plainly heard.

"Some Bar X roper goin' home," suggested somebody.

"If it's 'Fatty' Hewes, he can't sleep with me if he's comin' here," announced a surly-looking wrangler. "The last time, he turned over in the bunk and done popped me out on my neck on a saddle-horn."

"Well, you *hombres* needn't look at me," declared another, fondling a branding-iron. "I ain't aimin' to listen to no personal rem'niscences 'bout three queens beatin' two jacks with double-sweetenin' in the pot, like ol' man Clarke done the night he stayed here—if it's him that's comin'."

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The roper by the door began to unlace his boots.

"Mus' be somebody the houn's knows," he said. "They ain't makin' no ruckus."

The others followed his example, attending to the wholly rudimentary task of getting into bed. In the main this consisted of reducing to "sock feet," loosening belts and pulling up a blanket. Seven-up being nearest, reached up to turn out the oil lamp that swung smokily from a bracket.

"Blame it all," he exclaimed. "Wish ol' Harm was here to give us 'Two Lil' Gals in Blue.' " His voice was lugubrious.

There was a scrape of feet in the doorway.

"Wishin's havin'!" remarked a voice they all knew.

As one man they turned toward the door as into the circle of light stepped the battered and torn figure of their beloved "piper," Harmonica Davis. For a brief second the outfit stared unbelievingly. Then they catapulted from the bunks with whoops and howls of delight. Johnnie Murray was counting tally-sheets in the ranch-house. He heard the commotion and, whipping a shotgun from the wall, started on the run. When he reached the bunk-house, he found Harmonica being pommeled joyously by his fellow ropers, the while he was deluged by a bedlam of questions. Johnnie Murray shouldered his way through the crowd.

"Well, you —— teasin' hickory-head," he shouted, "did you get the Hellion?"

Harmonica dropped weakly into a hide-bottomed chair.

"Gimme a smoke, you herd of mad hyenas," he protested. "I ain't had the makin's since yestiddy."

A dozen sacks were thrust at him. He rolled a generous "pill," inhaling the smoke hungrily. Then he turned to the aggregation and looked them over.

"If it ain't too much of a strain on yore poor benighted constitution, would you be so kind as to inform us did you get him?" the foreman inquired with elaborate courtesy.

Harmonica blew a wreath of smoke ceilingward.

"If I said I did, you'd say right away I was a plumb liar," he replied. "An', if I said I didn't, right away you *hombres* would say, 'I told you so,' the which is onpleasant palaver. Bein' hog-tied, as it were, I gives you flop-eared sand-hoppers three guesses, the which one of you might be right."

Seven-up leaned over and picked up a saddle from the corner, testing the weight in his hand. Harmonica grinned at the action, and suddenly his seriousness vanished, and he leaned forward.

"Boys!" he said. "We done got the Hellion—li'l' ol' paint and me!"

The outfit stirred incredulously.

"What's more," he continued. "We done brung him home with us. He 'lows he's aimin' to be a member of the Hash-knife fambly as a first-class cattle-hoss, and he's goin' to be plumb tickled to meet you." There was a note of pride in his voice that refused to be kept under.

"My Gawd!"

The exclamation was wrung from Locomotive Johnson. For a moment he stared at Harmonica unbelievingly. Without a word he rose and strode out through the door and down the path to the corral fence. By a common impulse the others started to their feet with the same objective, to be arrested by Harmonica's voice.

"Hey, mavericks," he called. "Go easy there. He's plumb skittish yet."

His words checked them slightly, but they hurried nevertheless, following in the wake of Locomotive. In the dim starlight of the desert sky they could just make out shadowy outlines at the corral fence—two animals tethered at some distance apart. One they recognized as Harmonica's pinto pony. The other towered above him, a colossal, black figure of a horse that reared and plunged at their approach. Even in that dim light there was no mistaking the magnificent outlines.

"My Gawd!" reiterated Locomotive, in awestruck tones.

The words seemed to express the unspoken emotions of the rest. In silence they hung over the rail in a solemn row and looked at a sight they had never expected to see in all their lives—the Hellion tied to a fence with a bridle.

"——!" exclaimed a roper after a bit. "It don't seem right—a rope on an animile like that."

Johnnie Murray sighed.

"It ain't," he said emphatically. "It's like—" he groped for a comparison—"it's like seein' a woman spit, by jing!"

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IT WAS close to midnight when Harmonica Davis finished his narration of the capture of the Hellion to the outfit sitting in a tense circle beneath the wavering shadows of the bunk-house lamp.

"An' so," he said whimsically in conclusion, "I played to him. I don't know why—reckon because the ijea hit me when I was ridin' herd with nothin' but the stars and a lot of fool muleys for comp'ny. It kinda comes to me then that hosses was like hoomans, the same bein' contraptions of the Almighty that runs good or bad accordin' to the handlin' of 'em. I opines that not showin' savvey in handlin' 'em makes a heap of trouble all along the line. The which I makes up my mind I'm goin' to get the other fellow's viewpoint before I acts."

He glanced out of the window where the Hellion pawed the ground restlessly in the moonlight. The rest sat silent. After a bit he went on.

"I don't know how long I plays to him—it might have been a couple of hours; it might have been more. He lays there in the sand, not battin' an eye but just bustin' with curios'ty and a-hatin' me the best he knew how. I reckon he expected a right smart quirtin' or a hot iron laid on his laig any minnit. I don't reckon he ever heard any music in his life, and mebbe it sounded kinda comfortin' to him, layin' there all stove up. Anyhow, when I sees he's beginnin' to act like a gent, I starts palaverin', just like I'm talkin' to you-all.

"I tells him he warn't showin' hoss sense—actin' the way he done—for an intelligent animile, rampsin' round on the range an' associatin' with bad comp'ny. I p'ints out he's takin' chances of bustin' his laigs in a coulée and dyin' plumb miserable and thirsty, jus' because he couldn't listen to no reason from *hombres* older'n hisself. I throws in all the high-power stuff I knows. Oh, I sure gives that hoss ——!

"Finally I lets him get up on his feet. He rar's round some, but I reckon the ol' world kinda looked good right side up once more, and he begins to take it reasonable. I does some more talkin', tellin' him I'm goin' to make a cow-hoss out of him. He don't like it none, for he keeps rollin' his eyes and lookin' mean, but that don't make no diff'rence to me, and I has my say. And he kinder sighs like a kid that don't want to listen to a scoldin', and he quits buckin'.

"Well, between my palaverin' and playin', we stays out on the mesa mest three days. I didn't feed him much, and it didn't take that animile no time at all to learn who owned the oats. Bimeby I got him so plumb reasonable I could scratch him on the nose, else he didn't chow none, the which any fool animile can onderstand. Treatin' him square was somethin' new to him, too, and it takes him a long time to get the ijea through his hoss head, but he gets it final. The fourth day I leads him down to ol' man Johnson's at the Three-R, and we gets a double-cinch on him. It took three of us to make it, but I'm sayin' this that he acted a heap more decent than I expected."

The foreman broke into the conversation.

"How far'd you ride him?" he asked with a wink at the others.

Harmonica grinned.

"I didn't say as how I rode him," he retorted. "I got on him howsomever. Tomorrow I'm goin' to try it again. An' before I gets through with that Hellion hoss, he's goin' to be right contented, he is."

"I'll bet he throwed you some pretty," remarked Seven-up with eminent satisfaction.

Harmonica shook his head.

"I'm sayin' that the *hombre* that first called him the Hellion done knowed his business," he agreed. He turned on them. "An' that's all," he went on. "I'm not aimin' to sit up all night an' palaver with you coyot's. I'm goin' to get some sleep. I ain't felt a bunk for two weeks."

He waved his hand with a gesture of finality.

Johnnie Murray rose magnificently to the occasion, the most momentous in the whole of the Hashknife's glorious history. He turned to Seven-up.

"Go up to the house," he said, "an' tell the Chink to give you my bottle of red-eye—the special one in the locker. This here outfit's goin' to libate full and proper in honor of what's took place. An' I wants to say here and now that, as far as I am concerned, the Rio Grande's the limit!"

VI

THE remaking of the Hellion into a first-class saddle animal is still regarded as one of the romances of the cow-country which borders on the Mojave Desert. A man of lesser

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cognoscience than Harmonica Davis would have given it up, for the animal was the victim of peculiar vagaries and wild ungovernable bursts of temper that made the task one of continual difficulty. Harmonica, however, only smiled quietly to himself and kept doggedly at his task, until, by the time the dryness of the late Summer began to give way to the intermittent rains of the later Fall, even the most sceptical of his fellow ropers was forced to admit that he was making good. The secret of his system, however, always continued to be somewhat of a mystery. Johnnie Murray put it into words one night.

"You plumb got him hypnotized," he said, shaking his head. "I used to think I knowed a heap 'bout handlin' mean mavericks, but I never seen nobody larrup the cussedness out of an animile by treatin' it like a married woman. It's plumb scandalous!"

"I treats him like he was folks; that's all," Harmonica replied. "He's gettin' to think so hisself, bein', as I promulgates at first, a real gent at heart."

"Well," retorted the foreman. "You got yore own ijeas, and you're welcome to 'em. Me, I can handle jackasses, muleys and humans and get by fairly decent. But you ain't goin' to convince me you can eddicate a skunk into bein' a bunch of vi'lets by growin' leaves on his tail. The which I hopes you gets my ijea."

"I gets it O.K.," replied Harmonica. "An' I can't help thinkin' of the skunk's feelin's to hear you speak that way."

A glare was the foreman's only answer.

VII

THERE is one pest in the cow-country that still exists today as it did fifty years ago, although to a considerably less degree, and that is the cattle-rustler. As an institution he has long since passed. But there still remain, in various portions of the country, individual exponents of the early type, whose activities, as in bygone days, still continue as a source of constant annoyance to cattle-owners and sheriffs upon whom falls the onerous duty of ultimate extermination.

On the Mesa Perdita "Bud" Morgan was tacitly regarded as a survivor of this much detested species. In a small way Morgan was known as a cattle-buyer, which, as every cowboy knows, covers a multitude of activities of a varied nature. Owning to the upper San Bernardino Mountains as his native habitat, he traveled from place to place with a gang of hard-faced punchers, buying and selling strings of cattle wherever he could. While suspicion was rife that many of his transactions were not above scrutiny, there were no direct accusations, on account of Morgan's reputation as a quick shot and his possession of an implacable temper.

There were many occurrences, however, that led to a fund of growing distrust of Morgan and his gang. Yearlings and heifers would invariably disappear mysteriously whenever the Morgan crowd was known to be in any section of the country. Occasionally stray animals, tired and worn as if driven from some distant point, would be found wandering on the ranges on the trail of the gang's passing.

Most of these animals were strange to the Mesa country, and many of them came from herds far to the north, it would afterwards be learned. Now and then evidences of altered brands would appear—symbols changed to blurred outlines, indications that brandings had been done through soaked leather or wet blankets and ear-gotches cross-knifed to destroy identification.

The Hashknife outfit were not so reticent in the expression of their suspicions as most of the other ranches. This was because they were a hard-riding, quick-shooting aggregation, peaceful enough in repose, when their privileges remained unchallenged, but one of the most belligerent in the country when their rights were trampled upon. Whatever gossip may have reached the ears of the Morgan gang as to the Hashknife opinions, it was not of such a nature as to lure the rustlers to try conclusions in open affray as they had done with less prepared outfits.

Matters were at this pass when one night Harmonica Davis, riding herd with the Hellion under saddle, found a handful of Hashknife stock penned in a blind coulée. The animals were exhausted from hard driving and showed evidences of recent rebranding. Harmonica brought the matter to the attention of the foreman.

"The only thing I see," he said, "is to get a bunch together and slap a circle

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around the Mesa. The first *hombre* we catch shovin' cows we'll grab and string up. This borrowin' cattle is gettin' too plumb frequent to be funny."

The foreman nodded.

"There's a dance in town tonight," he said slowly. "There'll be a lot of ranch-owners in. What say we take a little pasear down and talk it over? I think you got the right ijea."

"You can't get action any too soon to suit me," commented Harmonica. "I'd sure like to see them hyenas run off the map."

Accordingly, the two rode into town and made Black le Farge's a stopping-point early in the evening. There, as Johnnie Murray had predicted, they found the most important cattlemen and ranch-owners in that portion of the county congregated in anticipation of a ball which was being given by a local fraternal order. The foreman lost no time in explaining his presence at that particular time. Climbing on a chair, he set forth in unembelished language the situation that faced them all and Harmonica's suggested remedy. When he had finished, there was a chorus of hearty assent.

"Let's get busy right away," shouted Hardy Stuart of the Lazy Fish outfit. "I've been loanin' them Morgans rib steaks for two years, the which they never so much as thanked me for."

"The coyot's 've been hookin' me for ridin' stock 'til I'm plumb sick of it," called out Hanson of the Circle 8 ranch.

Others present expressing much the same opinion, it was decided after some discussion to conduct a round-up of the Morgan gang at one fell swoop. Finding that most of the big ranches were represented, those present adjourned to a back room, where the final plans were laid for a rodeo of the rustlers. The outstanding feature was the formation of a big posse to meet the following night in Poncho Valley, where the work of cleaning up the range was to commence.

"Who's goin' to lead this here aggregation of sin-chasin' pirates?" demanded an Oak Leaf rider.

There was a general shuffling of feet and a craning of necks. Johnnie Murray spoke up.

"I'm for makin' this necktie party legal and regular," he said. "What's the matter with Sheriff Bill Doble?"

"Sure thing!" The answer came from several parts of the room.

"You see," the foreman continued, "ol' Bill's got a couple of scores with them rustlers to settle hisself, and he'd raise rim if we didn't bring him along."

The general sentiment being one of approval, it was decided that the sheriff should have the honor of leading the posse in its "house-cleaning" expedition. This settled, Johnnie Murray turned to Harmonica.

"You'll have to go along and boss the boys from the Hashknife," he said. "I got to be in Alamot tomorrow night to meet a couple of cattle-buyers comin' down on the late train. I won't be back 'til the day after. I hate to miss the fun, but business is business."

"You can bet Harm's comin'," called out a ranch-owner. "He's got the only hoss fit for huntin' rustlers hereabouts. Possein' without the Hellion 'd be like goin' to a dance without pants."

"All right," said the foreman. "Harm'll be along with his bunch of crow-bait. The rest of you can keep up all right with an ornery cayuse like him. If you get a sight of Bud, plug him a couple with my compl'ments. You better take along yore artillery. It ain't goin' to be no Methodist picnic."

"Not for Bud, it ain't," agreed Hardy Stuart grimly.

The following night just at moonrise the posse assembled in accordance with the arrangements. Singly and in twos and threes they straggled in from ranches above and below the raided district until about fifty seasoned, well-armed riders were assembled. There was little speech among them, a voice or a call being sufficient to establish identification. They found Bill Doble and Harmonica waiting.

The sheriff looked them over.

"How do we stand tonight?" he asked with his customary directness.

Parente, owner of the J. P. ranch, one of the richest in the upper valley region, forced his horse through the crowd.

"They got into me for eight of my best longhorns last night," he said.

There was a moment of silence.

"Well," said the sheriff, "I reckon we know what to do. Stick up yore hands!"

In a solemn group they obeyed, while he administered the oath that constituted them

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deputy sheriffs. Then without further command they set off toward the J. P. rancho, riding with the long easy lope that represents the acme of endurance for a cow-pony.

Four miles to the southward and two miles from the J. P. ranch the posse spread out like the opened fingers of a hand. It was agreed that whoever picked up the trail of the raiders was to make a note of the direction they had taken. The posse was to meet at Eagle Rock at midnight and compare notes. In this way a large area would be thoroughly covered in a comparatively short period of time. A shot was to be the signal for instant mobilization of the entire force.

It was a rider from the Pieplate crowd that found the trail—a blurred mass of tracks showing faint in the brilliant black and silver moonlight and leading eastward toward the upper confines of the Arroyo del Frio. With practised eye he noted the number—two score or more riders and twice that number of cattle. His discovery, told to the rest of the posse at midnight, brought instant action.

"They're headin' Porto way," announced the sheriff when the rider had finished. "That's an all-day and night ride through the valley. We can just about do that by sundown. If we can cross the quicksand, we'll lay to for the night to rest the cayuses and then move in on 'em at sunup. They'll just about hit the mesquite off the Butte by tomorrow mornin' the way they're headin'."

Porto was on the far rim of the desert's bowl. If the rustlers could make that point, they would undoubtedly be safe from pursuit in the sandy mountain trails which lay in the foot-hills beyond. Hard riding on the posse's part would bring the latter within striking distance before the rustlers' band could reach the safety of the country they knew. It was this that the sheriff intended to accomplish. He swung his animal toward the east.

"Come on," he said. "Let's hike—*pronto!*"

SAVING their animals for the long grueling ahead, the posse started. There would be hours of plodding through blistering heat before the end of the valley was reached and the dim outlines of Porto's squat dwellings silhouetted against the horizon, with the cool of the night far behind. It would be exhausting work for both men and animals—but it had to be done.

All night they went on. At dawn there came a halt and a brief rest. The horses stood with drooping heads, bridles trailing on the ground. The posse curled silently at their feet, munching jerked beef or smoking. Whatever there was of conversation was mostly in monosyllables, for man-hunting does not breed garrulity. In the distant sky they could read the day's heat prophesied in the brilliant morning colors that crept over the hills.

They were away again, going more slowly now but steadily.

Hour after hour it was the same. The sun crept up, burning through their sombreros, searing their faces and blistering their skins. The rifle-butts, as they swung in the holsters, were hot as oven-tops. The horses lathered under the saddle-blankets, and the lather dried on them in ridges like foam along an ocean shore when the tide is out. Sometimes a lone jack-rabbit braved the heat to rear on end and stare curiously at them. Twice they saw buzzards circling.

Toward noon the posse reached a water-hole. There was a brief respite here. Just beyond they found several fresh carcasses where hard-driven cattle had foundered. Occasionally they came upon one by the wayside, gasping in the heat—a heifer here, a steer there. Harmonica Davis' rifle always ended their suffering.

"Gosh A'mighty, them rustlers is sure drivin' them cattle," he commented, his voice filled with resentment at the unnecessary hardship which had been visited upon the animals.

"It ain't no wonder we never been able to run Morgan down before now," the sheriff growled, mopping his dripping forehead, "if this is the way they been movin'."

Just at sundown, with the air hot and stifling, they swung out of the valley's mouth. Toward the hills they could see the border-line of the State, a yawning mouth set with discolored granite teeth. The long horizon was spanned with rolling mounds of hills that appeared as amber beads laid upon a great gray table. Beyond was the mountain country and between was the strip of patched and broken territory whose mesquite thickets formed a natural hiding-place for the rustler's band. It also

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served to retard fast cattle-driving, 'a circumstance on which the sheriff with his usual foresight had counted.

"We're closin' in," he said, rising in his stirrups for a good look ahead.

The sight heartened the rest of the posse. They pressed eagerly forward, for the first time since they took up the chase urging their mounts to increased effort. An hour's steady travel brought them into the parched bed of a creek, from which they could see far ahead a dust cloud hanging lazily in the air that, to a cattleman, means but one thing—the movement of herds through an arid and alkali section of country. The sheriff pulled rein and jerked a thumb ahead.

"They're campin'," he said. "I reckon we might as well stay where we are for the night and move over in the mornin'. There ain't a chance in a thousand they'll move before we get there."

The posse peered through the lowering shadows. Tiny wisps of smoke were creeping upward into the quiet air, wavering against the hills like Indian signal columns. The rustlers, satisfied that they had outdistanced all pursuit by the grueling pace at which they had been traveling, had discarded precautions and were building fires for the night.

The posse climbed stiffly from the saddles, watered the animals from the canvas saddlebags and turned them loose in hobbles until feeding time. The sheriff stood for a moment, lost in silent contemplation of the Hellion. After a bit he nudged one of the posse with his elbow.

"Look at that hoss!" he exclaimed in admiration. "Did you ever see an animile that can stand the goin' that cayuse can?"

The roper looked. The stallion was pawing the ground fretfully, as if he were anxious to be away. The long, hard trip, which had exhausted the other horses in the party, seemed to have had little effect on him.

"There ain't nothin' on four laigs can touch him," sighed the roper enviously. "He's as fresh right now as a hunk of raw meat." He shook his head and continued. "At that, Harm can have him. He's a right mean maverick, and he'll kill somebody yet."

"Well, it won't be me," said the sheriff. "Not while I got my health and strength and my shootin' eye!"

With the horses disposed of, the members of the posse settled down to the evening meal of which they were in sore need. Using their damp blankets as shields, they started tiny mesquite fires with little light and less smoke, boiling coffee and frying bacon as if rustlers were the least of their troubles. Squatted squaw-fashion on the sand, they ate in silence, save for a brief comment now and then. The meal ended, they brought out smoking material and, selecting comfortable positions with the buoyancy of men long used to life in the open, discussed the coming battle with the rustlers.

"I'm hopin' we get this here maverick Morgan this trip," commented one of the ranch-owners. "You got to get the root to kill the crop."

"Don't worry," remarked another. "Them buzzards we seen hangin' around today 'll get some blamed fine eats by tomorrow."

"Well, I ain't agreein' with the 'fine' part," objected a third, "but, anyhow, it'll be eats. I ain't particoolar cheerful the way they was eyin' me, for one."

"Most likely they'll get a bite or two out of this bunch—them rustlers is bound to get some of us." This from a Lazy Fish rider.

The thought sobered them. They relapsed into silence. The mesquite fires died down. Here and there a rider hunched himself into a fresh position and tried to catch a bit of sleep before the morning. Two men were told off to guard the camp, to be relieved at twelve o'clock.

As the air grew chill, blankets came up to keep out its nip. Now and then a cigaret glowed in the dusk as the more restless of them smoked watchfully. The moon came up, embossing the posse as an irregular blotch on the sand. Off in the brush the horses stamped and snorted. There was nothing in the peaceful pose of it all to indicate the deadly purpose which lay behind. Waiting armies are like that.

IT LACKED three hours to sunup when Harmonica Davis read his watch by the light of a cigaret-end.

"Four o'clock!" he announced in a low tone.

The sheriff rose stiffly.

"Wake 'em up," he said. "We're startin'!"

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The more wakeful ones shook the others into life. The sheriff gave his orders.

"We'll go in two bunches," he said. "I'll go first, knowin' the lay. Harmonica Davis'll take the rest of you. Cut out the talkin' and go in Injun file. There's a cottonwood dead ahead. We'll leave the cayuses there and finish on the hoof. I don't know how many we're up against, but I reckon we'll handle 'em." He ran his eye over the grim, alert figures, half-showing in the dim light. "When we get all set, I'm goin' to give 'em a chance to quit like gents and be hung. If they don't, we'll pot 'em where the buryin' is good."

The posse understood. It had been a long chase. The irritation that preceded it, however, had been of longer standing. The rustlers had stolen red-handed. They were about to be caught red-handed. There were but two answers to the game they played—the bullet or the noose. It was a chance they had taken, and they had lost the play.

Surrender and incarceration in jail was out of the question, for the Mesa Perdita had no jail. It must of necessity be a battle to the death. Unpleasant as it was, the job must be done that the range might be clean and honest. In such manner was reform crystalized simply into practical ethics.

Resaddling their mounts, the members of the posse swung in behind the sheriff. They went single file as he had ordered, thereby minimizing the chances of being seen from the rustlers' camp by a chance lookout. There was just light enough for each man to see the man ahead. The only sound was the creak of leather and the crunch of hoofs on the gravel.

At the cottonwood they dismounted at a signal. With rifles cupped under their arms, they waited. The sheriff whispered a few final instructions to Harmonica Davis. The latter nodded. Without words the two parties separated until each faded from the view of the other.

The sheriff swung off toward the west, making frequent detours around flat open spaces where there was danger of being seen. The rustlers had encamped on a slight elevation. A few minutes of steady going brought the sheriff on the far side of the encampment with a gleam of firelight showing through the matted underbrush. Harmonica went straight ahead until he could see, outlined against the same light, the forms of men in various postures of relaxation spread about the ground in front of the fire. Harmonica gave a sign, and the men with him crouched low in the brush and waited.

For the better part of an hour the posse remained motionless. Two men on guard in the camp rose once during that time and threw a handful of brush on the fire. The dancing shadows brought out the camp more clearly but not sufficiently to determine the exact number of rustlers there. On the far side of the brush the sheriff waited patiently. He had learned by experience that cattle-rustlers do not always stay together and that an ambush was possible. So he took his time.

The dawn was just peeping over the hills when he looked at his watch. Five o'clock! He gave a sign. Instantly the waiting posse began to spread out, following instructions. At the same instant Harmonica Davis glanced at his own timepiece, picked up his rifle from the ground and, followed by his detachment, started a similar maneuver. When the sheriff's party formed a concave circle some two hundred feet in length, he halted and gave a quick look along the line. The stage was set.

Swinging his Winchester to his shoulder, the sheriff lifted himself on one knee. Without raising his voice above a conversational tone, he snapped out an order.

"Hands up! You're covered!"

The words carried with startling clearness. Instantly the camp was in confusion. One of the guards jumped to his feet and reached for a weapon. A rifle cracked up on the hillside. He pitched forward on his face. Others sprang up. Some sought cover behind saddles. One or two stood uncertainly, fingering weapons. These slumped down oddly and curled over on their faces. The still air filled suddenly with smoke—the whine of lead.

A bullet jerked the sheriff's hat from his head. He ducked. A Hashknife roper beside him grunted and turned over with a hideous grin. The sheriff cursed and squinted along his rifle sights. A rustler raised his head; the sheriff's bullet turned him completely over. Higher up behind the mesquite Harmonica Davis and his crowd went into action. Their bullets threw up little flecks of dust. A rustler

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nning for cover was killed in three paces. o it went.

Stuart, of the Lazy Fish crowd, nudged Harmonica with his elbow.

"There's one of 'em wigglin' on his belly."

He pointed. Harmonica caught a glimpse of a hat through the bushes.

"I wonder——"

He broke off. Stuart nodded.

"Sure it is," he answered the unfinished question. "Bud's the only yellow houn' that would shake the gang."

Harmonica turned suddenly.

"You take care of the boys," he said. "I'm aimin' to get that maverick."

He started on a run through the brush, crouching to avoid the flying bullets. A few steps brought him to a rift in the bushes through which he could see the man he sought. It was enough to illuminate the leader's purpose. He was deliberately deserting his gang and making for his horse, which was tethered at the far edge of the camp.

HARMONICA made a quick calculation. The Hellion was directly behind him, pawing the ground and snorting with excitement. There was little chance that he could bring Morgan down with a quick shot and every possibility that Morgan would reach his mount and escape. The only answer was the Hellion. Even as the thought registered, Harmonica swung in his tracks and started on a run for the cottonwood tree.

The Hellion reared back as Harmonica ran up. It was the work of but a moment to spring on his back. As he raced back toward the rustlers' camp, he caught a brief glimpse of his quarry roweling his horse up into the lower end of the coulée that opened out on the flatlands beneath. Morgan glanced back over his shoulder as he sped into the brush-grown trail. The sight of the Hellion gathering momentum added another burst of speed to his attempt to escape. Harmonica, uncertain of the country, held the Hellion back, the stallion fighting him every inch of the way.

As he crowded into the coulée, he heard the sound of firing drop away behind him. He wondered at the cause of it, but he had no time to investigate. Up ahead, over the sound of his own horse, he could hear the rustlers' leader plunging ahead. He rode carefully, avoiding rough stretches, guided only by the sound.

Back at the camp the rustlers, suddenly realizing that they had been deserted, tied a bandanna handkerchief to a rifle-barrel and thrust it upward. The sheriff waited a moment and then, as there were no further evidences of hostility from the camp, stood upright and walked boldly out into the open.

"If you got enough," he shouted, "leave yore guns on the ground and walk out! Keep yore hands up!"

The few remaining members of the band obeyed with alacrity. There was a scant handful of them left, so deadly had been the posse's marksmanship. Within the space of the next few minutes all that remained of the worst band of cattle-thieves that had ever operated on the Mesa Perdita and its environs was a group of scared, miserable and trussed men, huddled uncertainly together, awaiting the disposition of the posse.

The herd of stolen cattle, which had been temporarily penned in a tiny coulée behind the camp, had stampeded at the first sound of shots. Some of the posse started out to round them up. The rest gathered up the prisoners and, leaving a small handful to bury the dead where they had fallen, went after their horses, bringing a score of stolen animals with them. At the cottonwood tree the sheriff ran his eye over the posse's horses.

"Where's the Hellion?" he demanded.

A score of eyes followed his glance. Harmonica's mount was missing. Likewise Harmonica himself.

"My ——!" exclaimed Locomotive Jones in sudden consternation. "I wonder if he's shot!"

The posse gathered into a knot in sudden excitement. Hardy Stuart in a few words told of Bud Morgan's escape and Harmonica's pursuit. The sheriff frowned.

"Half a dozen of you take a run up the coulée and see if you can find him. I'll go on in with the rest. We got business to attend to."

He cast a significant glance toward the prisoners.

Several of the Hashknife crowd and a number from adjoining ranches swung in together and galloped off up the coulée. The sheriff and the rest started back to civilization, the sheriff cursing softly to himself. One of the prisoners protested against the tightness of his bonds.

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"Shut up," growled the sheriff. "I got other worries than figgerin' on yore circulation. You ain't goin' to need any shortly."

FAR up the coulée Harmonica and the Hellion continued the pursuit of Bud Morgan, the leader of the rustlers. The latter had the advantage of knowing the ground perfectly and of being mounted on a small animal that could follow the winding turns of the creek bed with greater facility than the more heavily built stallion, whose fastest traveling ground was the open country. The coulée ended against the slope of a hill, the top of which spread out in a plateau that led away toward Mordana Valley. It was a span of two miles across that top, and it was Harmonica's hope that the rustler would seek the open. Once there, it would soon be over because of the Hellion's superior speed and endurance.

The matted underbrush thinned out as the grade turned upward toward the crest. Suddenly it ended abruptly. As he took the slant, Harmonica gave the Hellion his head. The stallion responded in great leaping strides that took him out on to the tableland at a terrific rate of speed. As they reached the level, Harmonica pulled the animal to a quick halt. To his utter astonishment there was absolutely no sign of either Bud Morgan or his horse. Both had seemingly vanished as completely as if the ground had opened and taken them in. For a mile across the open level of the plateau there was no indication of life.

"Li'l' hoss," he said, "what do you know 'bout that?"

Almost at the words there came the whine of a bullet. Something crashed between his shoulder-blades. He felt it tear through precious tissues and into his chest. He reached for his rifle. It caught in the scabbard. His hand went to his hip, where his revolver swung. The Hellion pivoted to meet the new danger. Of a sudden things swam dizzily for Harmonica. He rocked in his seat, clutching for support. The earth came upward to meet him. His feet loosened in the stirrups—blackness....

After a moment Bud Morgan cantered leisurely out of a clump of bushes to the right. He carried his rifle over the pommel of his saddle—alertly. Listening to assure himself that the pursuit had dropped away, he slid to the ground and walked over to the prostrate figure on the ground. The Hellion snorted and veered away. Morgan leaned down and turned Harmonica over—on his back. It had been a nasty shot but an effective one. Harmonica was bleeding from the mouth. His face was ghastly. There was a gaping hole in his chest.

A twig snapped. Morgan looked up suddenly. It was the Hellion coming closer, his eyes dilated. A sardonic smile spread over the rustler's face as he recognized the stallion. The latter's magnificence stirred a wave of admiration within him. With that animal . . . He looked back at the prostrate roper. Only for an instant he hesitated. His revolver found its way into his hand, the muzzle at Harmonica's ear. As his finger closed on the trigger, a thought struck him and he halted.

A shot might direct further pursuit in his direction. There was a better way. He dropped the gun and fumbled at his belt, bringing out a branding-knife—a glistening, long-bladed affair. He tested it between his fingers, trying the elasticity of it.

The sunlight caught the shining blade—glimmered, flashed. The Hellion threw up his head. Had Morgan known of the animal's past—of the corral with its smell of burning flesh, of the loud-voiced branding crew, of the mare weltering in a pool of blood—he would have been more careful. As it was, he looked up.

The Hellion came slowly toward him. Something in the animal's steady, baleful stare fascinated him. Instinctively he sensed that he was in danger—that he should move. He wanted to run, fear tugging suddenly at his heart. But his limbs refused to move. He remained as he was—rooted to the spot. Groping through his knowledge of wild animals, he sought for something with which to meet the situation. Still the Hellion came on.

The stallion's bridle was trailing underfoot. He trod on it. It brought him up sharply. He took another step, his teeth gritting. Again the jerk. He fought the pull of it with angry tosses of his head, only to find his weight on the leather thong holding him. Gradually the restraint broke through his primitive desire to kill. It was the restraint he had been taught,

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through many hard falls, to respect. The hate of the knife, of the man that held it, was a primitive impulse. But the bridle represented wisdom learned in the school of experience. After a bit he stood motionless.

Morgan dropped his knife back into his belt with a short laugh. His eyes strayed toward his lariat coiled on his saddle-horn. He walked toward it. The movement broke the spell. The Hellion swayed backward, freed himself, snorted—and crashed off through the underbrush, the bridle flying behind him.

Morgan fell to cursing. He did not know that the bit of leather thong, with its correlation to the human authority that the stallion had been taught to regard, was all that had stood between him and an awful death. He was conscious only that he had lost what he had coveted. He mounted quickly and set off in pursuit.

In the meantime, the riders who had set off in search of Harmonica Davis rejoined the main body of the posse with the information that they had been unable to find any trace of the missing troubadour or the Hellion. The sheriff motioned to Locomotive Jones, and the two rode out of ear-shot of the prisoners.

"Got any ijeas?" asked the sheriff.

Locomotive shook his head.

"No," he said. "I ain't. We opined Bud Morgan might have slipped somethin' over on him. Harm ain't no regular man-hunter, you know."

The sheriff nodded.

"The darned fool's too trustin' by natoore, for a fact," he agreed. "You got to be able to smell trouble when you're after a *hombre* like Bud."

"O' course," suggested the other, "Harm might have missed Bud altogether and taken a short cut home, figgerin' to beat us in."

"Well," said the sheriff, "if he ain't at the ranch when we get in, we'll get some fresh cayuses and hunt them up. I ain't quiet in my mind."

"Same here," said Locomotive.

The sheriff glanced back at the captive rustlers.

"I reckon by the time we get through stringin' them mavericks up at Dead Men's Oak, we ought to be feelin' a heap more cheerful, seein's it's goin' to make cattle-raisin' a lot safer from now on."

He turned back to the posse and gave the signal to proceed. The party took up a steady jog southward, making allowance in their travel for the members of their own party who were wounded. They were in the act of crossing the arroyo ford, west of Porto, when the sheriff's eye caught sight of a speck in the distance which seemed to be moving in their direction. He pulled up abruptly and studied it.

"Looks like somebody in an all-fired hurry!" he exclaimed after a moment's inspection.

THE speck came on steadily, now and then disappearing behind distant clumps of shrubbery, only to reappear through an occasional open vista. At first the posse could make nothing of it. Then, as it came closer, they could make out that it was a horse. It was traveling at a terrific rate of speed, hurdling bushes and chaparral in great leaping bounds like a frightened kangaroo.

"By jing!" exclaimed the sheriff. "There ain't but one hoss in the county can go like that, unless I'm an ornery snake."

He shaded his eyes and peered through the dust. The rest crowded close.

"He's carryin' a skewed saddle," said a Circle 8 roper suddenly.

A "skewed saddle" is the puncher's term for a saddle that has slipped and is trailing beneath a horse's feet.

"There's nobody on the animile—he's runnin' loco," he continued.

Tensely the little group of horsemen watched the animal come, smashing and careening through the brush at top speed. As it reached the upper end of the ford, it turned slightly in their direction. The next instant it came drumming up the gravel bed of the creek like an express-train, neck out, feet spurning the earth in a steady rhythm.

There was a clump of bushes that hid the view. For a moment they lost sight of the animal, but the sound of its feet grew louder and louder. Even as they rose in their saddles to watch the approach, the horse took the bushes in a great leaping bound that brought him high above them. With bunched feet he struck the ground and slid to a sliding stop a short distance away, the dust of his landing enveloping them in a cloud. Through the dimness of it they made out that it was the Hellion.

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The stallion was dyed from head to foot in the crimson of his own blood, where twigs and underbrush had torn ruthlessly at his silken coat. His bridle was gone, snapped off somewhere in the beginning of his wild flight. The wreck of a saddle dangled underneath his feet. He was panting violently, and his eyes rolled wildly. Instinctively every man in the party reached for a weapon of some kind, for the fear of the Hellion's deviltry was strong upon them.

"I knew it," said the sheriff quietly.

Locomotive Jones alone rode out from the rest and approached the panting, lathering animal. The Hellion snorted but made no effort to run. Locomotive jumped from his horse and came close enough to lay his hand on the stallion's flank. The latter veered away but permitted the roper to unstrap the remains of the saddle, which dropped on the ground at his feet. Then he backed away, circling toward the upper end of the arroyo. There he halted and looked back, pawing the earth and stamping impatiently.

"Let him alone a minnit," called the sheriff. "I got an ijea."

Locomotive stood stock-still. The stallion after a moment of hesitation came forward, whinnied and circled out into the bed of the arroyo. When the roper made no move, he repeated his tactics, running a few steps to whirl and paw the earth. Twice he circled the posse and ran for a short distance up the arroyo in the direction he had come, only to return and wait expectantly.

"I got it," announced the sheriff suddenly. "He's tryin' to tell us somethin' in hoss language. I'm aimin' to find out what it is." He swung on the posse. "Half a dozen of you follow me," he ordered. "The rest of you take them mavericks and string 'em up where you darned please. I ain't goin' to be hampered in my official duties by no hangin'."

He roweled his mount into sudden life. The Hellion promptly swung about and started off up the arroyo with the sheriff and a handful of the posse behind him. The stallion set a fast pace, and the others kept up as best they could. Up the slant they went and into the mouth of a coulée. For a bit they lost him; he was ahead again plunging up the grade. The sheriff and the rest plied quirt and spur out on to the flatlands. There, beside a figure sprawled grotesquely on the ground, they found the Hellion with drooping head.

They sprang from their animals and knelt beside Harmonica. With infinite tenderness they lifted him up, stopping the flow of blood as best they could.

Carrying him in his arms, the sheriff set out for the long trip home. Down the coulée the little cavalcade went—back to the ranch. It was a terrible journey, longer than the coming had been. They had to proceed more carefully. Twice they made camp and bandaged the hole in Harmonica's chest, stanching the ebbing life-stream. They fed him whisky continually, forcing it between his lips. Harmonica did not regain consciousness.

The journey through the valley they made at night, missing the heat. The sheriff stood in his stirrups many miles to ease the jarring of the horse, the others aiding. The Hellion came with them, trotting alongside. Occasionally he nosed the wounded man's head and nickered softly.

Toward dawn Harmonica stirred restlessly and muttered something.

"What did he say?" The question came from a roper.

"He said a hoss was a gent at heart." The sheriff's voice went suddenly husky, and he looked away.

Sunup and the beginning of another day. The Hellion refused to leave Harmonica's side. Locomotive would have used the rope, but the sheriff stopped him.

"We ain't got no right to send him away—now," he said.

A roper swung in.

"He's stickin' to Harm like it was his own brother," he commented.

"I'm thinkin' they was more pals than we knowed," said the sheriff.

THREE hours later the party rode down the last gully on the trail to the open mesa and the Hashknife ranch. As they struck the soft earth that marked the final lap of their journey, the Hellion suddenly left Harmonica's side and with upflung head came to a halt. The posse, startled by his unusual action, pulled up and watched him in silence.

The stallion was staring at a clump of matted bushes that formed a thicket to their left. To all intents and purposes

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the thicket was deserted, save for a possible jack-rabbit warren, and there seemed nothing out of the ordinary to cause attention. Yet the Hellion's ears were forward, and every muscle in his body was tense. As they watched, he began to walk slowly toward the bush, picking his way carefully and stepping high, his nostrils spread and every sense alert.

The sheriff swung broadside to Locomotive Jones and eased Harmonica Davis into his arms. Then he slipped his Winchester from its scabbard and walked toward the stallion.

He had gone a matter of only two paces when the stallion crouched suddenly and sprang.

For a brief second he was outlined against the sky in a great upward leap that carried him over and into the thicket. There came a scream of terror—the clatter of tinware—shot—stamping.

When they broke through, the sheriff in the lead, they found the Hellion trembling above a shapeless thing—a mass, trampled into the ashes of a smoking fire. At some distance away was a broken knife.

They pulled the Hellion away after a bit. There was water in the gully where a tiny stream trickled through. The sheriff motioned to one of the posse.

"Better take him and wade him," he said.

The roper nodded and caught the stallion's mane. The animal made no protest.

"Well," said the sheriff slowly, "I reckon the Hellion's finished the job good and proper. There ain't much for us to do now. He sure pulled the plug out'n our little necktie party. But I reckon he had his own ijeas 'bout a square deal——"

He broke off.

A Lazy Fish roper scratched his head.

"I dunno," he said. "He's done for Bud an' all that, but I'm wonderin' if Harm wouldn't have kinda liked to finish that job hisself?"

The sheriff shook his head.

"No," he said thoughtfully. "I'm thinkin' he'll be a heap pleased to know the Hellion savvied how to play his hand for him when he needed it. The which sort of backs up his argyment that all hosses and humans needs is an honest-to-God chance. I reckon the Almighty knowed what he was doin' when he give brains to some so they could show ijits in general what plumb jackasses they can be."

Noon. The ranch-house looked wonderfully good. The rest of the outfit came out silently. Doc Munson was already there. He had been working on the others. They carried Harmonica into the foreman's room and laid him on the bed.

It was an hour before they knew. Doc Munson read their unspoken question as he came out, wiping his hands. He nodded briefly.

"He'll make it." His tone was grave. "It's pretty bad, but he's husky. It's lucky you found him when you did. Another hour——"

He turned to Johnnie Murray.

"You better go in for a minnit," he said. "He's kinda worried 'bout his hoss."

"The Hellion?"

The physician nodded. The foreman's mouth tightened.

"Doc," he said, "you know how plumb scandalous I talked about that skate—a hoss bein' a hoss to me, good or bad, accordin' to the way they run. Harm always opined diff'rent. He 'lowed a cayuse was folks—plumb right underneath but needin' the right kind of savvey, most always, to bring it out. Well, he's done proved it with this here wall-eyed stallion. I wants to say right here—there ain't no white man ever done more for a friend on a show-down than this same animile. The which, any time he wants my shirt—hoss or no hoss—he gets it. He's down in the corral now, fillin' up on oats. When them's gone, he gets bran mash. An', if he wants to, God bless him, he can eat it off my best plate—the one with the flowers on."

Opening the door, he went inside.

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THE RED SHEPHERDESS

by Agnes and Egerton Castle

Authors of "The Accursed Town," "Auguste and the Supreme Being," etc.

MY TWO brothers looked at me very strangely as I came into the room. They had sent for me and, now that I stood before them, seemed as if embarrassed to express their wishes.

My cousin Herminie was also present. It had almost the air of a family conclave.

We were in that small house of exile, provided for us by the good offices of the amiable Lady Jerningham, in a little terrace at Richmond. It was a very ugly, sad place to us; a piteous contrast to the great hotel in the Faubourg St. Honoré, built in rivalry to Richelieu's palace and by some supposed, though of small proportions, to outdo it in elegance and architectural distinction. A change too, from the Château in Picardy dating from the days of Louis XI., with its pepper-box turrets, time-honored walls and vast domains.

But the contrast went deeper than in mere surroundings. We were orphans, outcasts, almost beggars. My elder brother, now at twenty-four the head of a family representing nothing but black misery, strove to eke out the charity pittance by giving fencing lessons. My second brother, who had a fine leg, earned ten shillings a week as demonstrator at a dancing class. I myself, the most studious, taught French at a little boys' class at Windsor. Herminie, that delicate flower of girlhood, kept house for us without a servant.

The era of bloodshed and horror in France had drawn to a close with the ever-growing power of the young Corsican general. My unhappy country was as the victim delivered from the claws of the wild beast, stretching itself timorously and licking and counting its wounds. There was a broadening hope that there might be a chance for the dispossessed, from royalty downward, to come into their own again, and my brothers and our friends were particularly bitter against the man who threatened to usurp the anointed place. Many old ladies, *emigrées* like ourselves, already spoke of him with bated breath as anti-Christ.

And, after the pause which succeeded my entrance into our only sitting-room this afternoon of March—in the grotesque jargon of my distracted land: "*Ventose*, year ten of the republic, one and indivisible" —the name of Bonaparte was the first word my elder uttered.

"Bonaparte," said he, "has signed peace with England."

"What excellent news!" I exclaimed. "We can then return to France."

"Sit down, Thibault," said my brother Anne-Xavier, while the next in age to him, Philippe, smiled contemptuously across to Herminie, who pinched her lovely lips together as if to prevent herself smiling back.

I was the cadet of the family, snubbed by my relatives. Perhaps I was irritating to them because of my placid, not to say philosophic, disposition. They despised me for not living as they did in a constant state of fiery resentment, of active, if futile, rebellion against the republic and all its acts.

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"You are a fool," said Anne-Xavier succinctly after I had obeyed him. "Such news are not good, they are very bad. England was our last defender. The revolution is less dangerous than the Corsican. Bonaparte is aiming at supreme authority. He has made friends with the church. He will not stop until he sits upon the throne."

My two brothers and my sweet cousin seemed all three so possessed with wrath at this terrible thought that I refrained from uttering an opinion. Privately it seemed to me that any kind of settled government in France, even that of an usurper, would be preferable to the anarchy which had drenched it in blood and laid it waste by fire. But I knew that, if I had hinted at such a sentiment, I should have branded myself scarce less than traitor to their lofty minds.

My elder brother's glance unexpectedly softened as he contemplated me.

"You look singularly young, Thibault," said he. "You have the face of a girl."

I flushed at that. A youth of seventeen, self-supporting into the bargain, is not likely to take such a remark in good part.

"There is not," he proceeded, "as yet the smallest sign of manhood about you. Your voice, too, is as soft as Herminie's."

"If it is to taunt me with my youth," I exclaimed, jumping to my feet, "that you have sent for me——"

"Sit down, Thibault!" thundered Philippe. "We have sent for you to listen, not to make observations."

My second brother often went beyond the other in his zeal to uphold him. He did so in this instance.

"Pray, Philippe," said Anne-Xavier, "it is I, as the head of the family, who must deal with this matter. Do not think, Thibault," he went on, turning to me—and once again his eye was mild, though I could feel an inflexible determination behind his unusual gentleness—"do not imagine, my dear lad, that I am finding fault with you, above all for a state of affairs which, as it happens, is everything that I could desire. I am glad that you have so juvenile an appearance, that your cheek and your voice should be as soft one as the other. Were it not so, I should not pick you for the important mission——"

"A mission!" I interrupted.

Herminie shook her finger at me.

"In the name of heaven," she admonished, "let thy brother finish his speech, my little cousin. What would you say if one of your pupils were to break in upon you in the middle of a lesson?"

A lesson now! I was all at sea. There was a silence. In a little while I understood why Anne-Xavier had so much difficulty in explaining himself. Even at the time his hesitancy struck me unpleasantly.

"THIBAULT," said my elder at last, "though you are so young, the blood of the Juvignys runs in your veins and sets beating, I do believe, as loyal a heart as ever shed its blood for France. You come of a race that has reckoned fealty to its sovereign a matter of personal honor, something dearer than life itself. I will not believe," his measured tones kindled as he went on, "that the son of Anne-Xavier, sixteenth Count of Juvigny, whose noble head rolled on the scaffold because of his defense of his anointed king; the son of that high-souled lady, our beloved mother, Charlotte Marie Aurelie de Juvigny, née Montpensier-Cahusac, who was only dragged from her devoted attendance on her royal mistress to share her heroic husband's fate—I will not believe that you, who as a child stood behind the chair of Marie Antoinette, who was privileged to carry the martyred child, Louis XVII., in your arms, whom the sacred martyr himself has caressed, patted on the head——"

In spite of my dread of my brother's displeasure and my own generally philosophic disposition, the tension became more than I could endure. There was something sinister, to my ears, in this strange preamble.

"For God's sake, brothers," said I, and I felt indeed piteously young and at their mercy, "what is it that you want me to do? Speak straight out. I will bind myself to nothing in ignorance."

Philippe scowled, his countenance became empurpled, but Anne-Xavier checked him with a look, then he turned a severe eye on me, but Herminie unexpectedly took my defense.

"Thibault is right. It is not fair to want him to engage himself blindfold. Besides which," she added, impatiently, "there is no need for all this beating about the bush. I have too good an opinion

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of my little cousin," her gray eyes beamed on me, caressed me, nay, cajoled me, "to think for one second that he would hesitate."

"We are all returning to France, Thibault," said Anne-Xavier in a solemn voice, keeping me strongly under the domination of his gaze. "Philippe and I are for the Vendée, but we intend you for Paris."

For Paris? My heart beat quicker! A mission to Paris! Anne-Xavier and Philippe were, I knew, and had been ever since our exile, steeped to the very neck in Royalist plots, combinations into which I was considered too immature to be admitted. But that I was now to be the instrument of some new intrigue, I did not doubt. A sense of adventure began to possess me; sparks of excitement to tingle along my veins. I looked eagerly from one to the other.

"We believe," resumed my elder brother slowly, "nay, we know it for a certain fact, that if Bonaparte, that most dangerous and unscrupulous man, were removed——"

"Killed!" interpolated the headlong Philippe.

"Safely and irrevocably eliminated," Anne-Xavier took up the thread of his argument with a harshness of tone which betrayed effort, "the whole of France would return joyfully to her lawful allegiance."

I stared, as yet far from the appalling kernel of the disclosure.

"If Bonaparte were dead?" I ventured hesitatingly.

Philippe snapped his fingers.

"What's the good of being mealy-mouthed? Assassinated, Thibault."

"Executed," said Anne-Xavier, and the word rang like the toll of a bell.

Herminie sprang up from the chair on which she had been sitting sidewise, her folded arms upon the back, her chin leaning upon them while she watched us all with bright eyes.

"In fine, Thibault, dear little fellow," she said gaily, "Bonaparte being Goliath, you are wanted to play David."

"I? My God! I—make an assassin of me? It is a joke and a bad joke."

Courage and indignation were mounting together, but Herminie caught me by the arm and arrested further outcry on my lips by a single terrible phrase:

"If you will not be David, I will be Judith!"

"That is the issue at stake," said Anne-Xavier.

I stared wildly at Herminie. Almost from babyhood I had adored her. For the past three years I had known, boy that I was, that I would have no happiness in life without her. I might have a smooth cheek and a girl's voice, but I had a precocious heart—the heart of a man for her. And nothing yet of a man's selfishness had come to cloud the pure ardor of my secret flame. I never thought of her with reference to personal gain; all my impulse was toward reverent chivalrous service.

I would have died for her with more readiness, perhaps, than claimed her as my wife. Now the realization of the horrible peril to her—the contemplated sacrifice of her lovely tender womanhood, her unstained soul, to a perversion of patriotism—seared me with a physical pain as if a red-hot sword had been thrust through me.

I let myself fall back upon the horsehair couch from which I had again sprung and cried in a smothered voice—

"What then is it you want me to do?"

My brother drew a letter from his pocket and handed it to me. It was a large sheet, closely covered with writing, even on the flaps of the foldings to the very seals, I looked at the signature

Ever, Mignonne, thine from the heart, MARGUERITE DE BLOIS-FONTAINE.

"Marquise de Blois-Fontaine," I exclaimed. "Your godmother, Herminie! But I thought—I understood——"

Anne-Xavier cut me short.

"Yes, yes—you thought—you understood! The Marquise de Blois-Fontaine has not acted in accordance with the traditions of her house and the high standard of conduct imposed upon her as the widow of a *pair de France*. Do not again interrupt me, Thibault; I admit it. She has disgraced herself and her order, pandered to the evil spirit of the time, worse than all, conformed to the outrageous and cowardly heresy imposed by those monsters of tyranny who call themselves patriots.

"You have heard us say that we have severed all connection with a person so degraded. You have heard me forbid

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Herminie to reply to her letters. Nevertheless Providence sometimes places instruments in our hands which we feel ourselves constrained to use, however we may despise them—read that letter as I bade you, and you will see my meaning more clearly."

I TRIED to obey, though the confusion in my mind made it a task of some difficulty. The phrases seemed to run into each other and make little or no sense; indeed there was very little significance of any kind to be drawn from the first part of the lengthy epistle. It seemed to consist of jeremiads on the cruel and unkind attitude of the beloved god-daughter, coupled with rambling excuses and justifications for the line of conduct which had been forced upon the writer.

One would have to have a very bad heart to hold rigor with a poor little widow who has a blue fear of death; as well blame the hare for doubling and twisting when the hounds are at his heels.

The sentence evoked before me an image of the marquise as I remembered her, a handsome, indolent creature with the remains of great beauty, full of airs and graces and pretensions which would have scarcely become a much younger woman.

"Read on," ordered my brother as I looked up at him with a question on my lips.

Obeying, surprize increased upon me, for the next part of the letter was devoted to expressions of joy at the change which was coming over the country. General Bonaparte had restored law and order; he had made peace with the church; nonjuring priests had long resumed their ministry; she herself had been reconciled as soon as it was safe.

Since the good God has pardoned me, my little one, I venture to think you will not show yourself more difficult than He. Come and pay me a visit, now that you are free to leave England. Come to me, my Herminie. What can you, with your eighteen years—whom I remember already as a child, so attractive, so pretty—find to distract you in that gloomy land. You waste your charms in those *brumes*. Come to me; come to me at once. I promise you every pleasure which befits your condition. Paris is very gay. I see the best society possible. Next week there is a fancy ball at Cavalscalchi's, the Italian envoy to France; a costume ball, *ma mignonne!* The great Conqueror himself will be there.

I dropped the hand that held the letter and stared, first at my cousin and then at my brothers.

"Is Herminie then to go to her godmother?" I exclaimed.

It may have been very dull of me. But the rôle prepared for me by my relatives was so fantastic that it was natural enough that no glimmer of it should have dawned upon my brain.

Herminie spoke quickly before Anne-Xavier could answer.

"No; you are to go in my place."

"I?"

"Did I not tell you," she cried, swayed between an intense passion and some freakish spirit of mirth so that, while quivering, flushing and flashing at me, she also laughed; "did I not tell you, you were to be a little David?"

"David!"

"David in the clothes of Judith if you like! Ah, Thibault!"

She put her arms about me and pressed her cheek against mine.

My two brothers looked at each other and stepped back. I saw very well that they knew that Herminie was managing the business much better than they could themselves. I understood, too, in some unacknowledged region of the mind, that I was being cajoled as well as threatened. Nevertheless I was wax to that sweet fire.

She drew me toward a mirror and then:

"Look, *mon* Thibault," she whispered. "Are we not singularly alike? Will you not make a beautiful goddaughter for *la marquise* to chaperon?"

I stood transfixed, trying to bring my intelligence to grasp the whole incredible situation, while at the same time my eyes admitted with no little astonishment the truth of her statement.

I had always thought Herminie the perfection of feminine loveliness. It had never dawned on me that my boyish countenance bore the faintest resemblance to hers. Yet, viewed thus side by side—her cheek was once more pressed to my cheek—hers was carnation, mine crimson to the contact; my hair, chestnut like hers, hung down after the fashion of the day in long locks on either side of my face; we might have been sisters, twins.

I sprang back suddenly.

"My God," I cried, "what a mad idea!"

"It must be either you or I, Thibault."

Both my brothers pronounced the same sentence, in the tone of judges.

"It must be either she or you."

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"I will dress you up this very afternoon, *ti-ti*," cried Herminie. "What fun it will be! You must practise pretty ways, curtseys and little steps and how to manage petticoats."

She was but a child after all, and as ready to risk her own life and conscience as mine, I verily believe, but I thought Anne-Xavier's smile very cruel as he added:

"It will not matter if you are awkward. Madame de Blois-Fontaine will only put it down to Britannic savagery."

"And am I to bring a dagger or a stone, hidden about me to the *bal costumé*, to slay Goliath?" I asked, my voice trembling with a kind of anger that hurt me. "This is your plot, I suppose?"

"We have a better way," said Anne-Xavier, still with his smile.

He took up the letter I had dropped and read aloud,

" 'I have an *amour* of a costume for you, *mignonne*, the costume of a shepherdess, all in different tones of red. It is exquisite.' "

"I am to be a shepherdess, then. Shall I attack the Corsican with my crook?"

Philippe gave me a black look, but Anne-Xavier went on with a composure that disposed of my fierce irony more effectually than any display of severity.

"You will carry, in the bosom of that red frock, *Bergère*, a little bottle, and you will contrive that a few drops of its contents shall fall into the glass or the plate——"

I gave a cry, the cry of a thing trapped.

"You propose to make of me a poisoner!"

"Either you or I," said Herminie.

She marched up to me, her arms crossed, and looked into my eyes. Her face was white as death. I knew that mine was, too. I tried to speak but could form no word. What was the use? She had pronounced my doom. However I might struggle or protest, I was impaled on my love for her to my brothers' will.

II

"I HAVE never," said the Marquise de Blois-Fontaine, "seen so despairing a *tournure* in all my life! But how in the name of heaven, my child, did you give yourself such wrists and hands?"

I looked down at my offending limbs. They were certainly on the large size for a "young lady of good house," as the French idiom has it. They were extremely red, too, and the wrists and knuckles of undue prominence for my supposed sex.

I was by no means more reconciled to my rôle by finding myself in the thick of it. Nevertheless, the desperate determination to sacrifice all for Herminie grew with every difficulty.

"My dear godmother," I cried angrily, "you seem to forget that I have been doing the business of a maid-of-all-work! How have I given myself such hands? By scrubbing, polishing and cooking, by sweeping, breaking coal and chopping sticks! That develops the muscles, I assure you. As for the color, if you had had your fingers in as many tubs of hot water, under as many cold taps as I have, you would——"

She looked down at her dimpled taper hands, smooth as satin, tinted like a pearl.

"God forbid!" she exclaimed in genuine horror.

My apology was a kind of treachery to Herminie. It was true that she had done all these things, might still be doing them—for all I knew—at some farm lodging in la Vendée, for my two brothers. Nevertheless, she had lost no feminine grace, but in my eyes gained it. Many a day I could have knelt and kissed the black smudges on her slender fingers, worshiped her for the marks of toil that her labors left.

To myself I thought—

"You would rather have been a hundred times a pervert, madame the hare!"

To despise another person generally increases confidence in oneself.

"You must take me as you find me, *marraine*," I said airily: "a poor girl who has done her best according to her conscience and her love for her family. I can go back to England again, if you think I am likely to disgrace you."

"*Non, mignonne*," she began kindly, broke off and laughed. "*Mignonne* does not suit you at all! To think of my having chosen a shepherdess dress for you! *Vivandière* to a tramping regiment would be more in your line. But it is too late to change."

"Much too late," said I. "I am destined to be the Red Shepherdess."

"*La Bergère Rouge*"—there was something in the name fitting to my sinist-

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secret which pleased the bitter humor in which I found myself.

It was fortunate for me that my pseudo-godmother should have been so engrossed in her own preparations for the great ball in question that she had little interest left for mine. She offered me, it is true, the services of her second maid, adding, however, that the girl might have to hold the hair-pins for Isidore, the coiffeur who was coming instantly to dress her head, while the chief abigail tried the heat of the tongs.

"I am going as Pomona and, you understand, the classic head-dress needs the most careful adjustment, thousands of little ringlets, bound by the tiara, that will demand, oh, the most absolute concentration. You can conceive for yourself, one ringlet out of place——"

I had left the room before she had finished her phrase; only at the top of the stairs did I realize with what a schoolboy bound.

My costume lay on the great *duvet* of the bed, a glimmering sheen of reds by the light of the wax candles. The curtains were drawn against the Spring evening. The whole room itself was crimson, and I had a sense of entering some vault consecrated to blood, which for a second stifled me. Then I shook myself. The little vial which I wore all day between the central steel of Herminie's corset and my breast-bone—was it not warrant that my rôle was that of the Borgia and not of a Ravaillac?

The meanest form of assassination, but not gory; let me take what consolation I could out of the thought and clothe my stripling limbs in the flaunting scarlet!

But first I must don that wig of white pompadour curls with which Herminie had thoughtfully provided for the occasion in London. As I fixed it before the mirror, drawing down the artificial locks over my forehead, I marveled at the change produced. I made a very pretty woman; I could not but admit it—amazingly like Herminie upon those rare occasions when she assumed an aspect of special elegance.

The shepherdess garments were perhaps less successful. I could not get them to meet at the waist and had to cover a gap with the *fichu* of ordinary wear. On the other hand, it took all my stockings and a couple of silk handkerchiefs to prevent a most revelatory looseness across the chest. The kerchief in question was again extremely useful in concealing artifice, and, as I pinned it across my now elegant figure with Herminie's diamond brooch, I noted with a mixture of chagrin and satisfaction that my skin was indeed like that of a girl.

I tied on the mask, took my crook and surveyed myself in the long mirror, lit up by bunches of candles on either side.

The high heels of my shoes, the immense swing of the panniers, the glitter of the eyes through the mask, made of me, I thought, a most convincing shepherdess and an alluring. My heart began to beat with a sense of excitement that was like a draft of heady wine. I was in for it.

In my boyish awkwardness the precautions which were necessary for disguise had taken a considerable time. I found the marquise *coiffée* and robed, almost ready to be impatient.

One of the maids was kneeling at her feet, stitching a loosened sandal-string; the other with fixed eyes and pursed mouth, stood inserting a hairpin into what was, after all, a loosened ringlet. Painted like a hair-dresser's image, with three tri-color feathers sticking out of her Greek coronet and exiguous draperies of white satin wound about her plump figure, Madame de Blois-Fontaine was an amazing spectacle. I had removed my mask, and she screamed at sight of my face.

"Heavens! you can not go like that! Whoever saw a *Bergère* as white as a clown? and what have you put on that kerchief for? Little fool that you are, you spoil your whole costume! Tear it off her, *Marianne*."

I stepped back in alarm.

"She shall not touch it," I cried furiously on the spur of the impulse.

Then I held my breath. Had I betrayed myself?

The *marquise* gave a scornful laugh.

"One sees that you have come from the *pudique Albion!*" she exclaimed and gave a downward glance at herself which was full of satisfaction.

The situation was saved. I exhaled that breath of anxiety and allowed myself to be rouged, whitened and bepatched without protest.

"It is a thousand pities," said my hostess when this was accomplished, "that you will have to be masked most of the evening, for your face is the best part of you. You will never have a *tournure* of any charm,

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and that is fatal to the enjoyment of a masked ball. *Mais enfin,*" she shrugged her fat shoulders, "anything will amuse a savage!"

IN SPITE of her amiable disclaimer earlier in the evening, it was patent to me that she had lost all interest in me and that she would not lament the moment of my departure.

Anything will amuse a savage, she had said. I was as much out of it, God knows, as any savage; constricted in my shepherdess clothes and conscious of every angle in my boy's frame! Yet, weighed to the earth with a burden of guilt on my heart so that it seemed as if the soles of my red shoes had turned to lead, the moment I crossed the threshold of the Italian envoy's magnificent mansion a sense of infinite weariness took possession of me. Gone was the sparkle of adventure, gone the tingle of excitement that had made me feel, up in my red room, like a racer before the water jump.

I would have given my right hand to be free of the business. When I reflected that the very best that could happen to me was to be able to step back into Pomona's coach and be driven home, an unsuspected and successful murderer, a kind of inward shudder would seize me in which it seemed to me I could hear my soul's teeth rattle.

The whole animated scene became a ghostly show; the chattering, dancing, laughing, masked throng, in their brilliant costumes so many mocking demons; the music—I heard people say it was a very fine band, and there were violins and viols and flutes and harps to it, I know—rang in my ears like tolling bells. My supposed godmother abandoned me to my fate after one or two vain attempts to match me with a suitable partner in the shape of some spry young republican. I could dance well enough, but not the lady's part, and my high heels got so awkwardly in my way that I thought the wiser course was to avoid any such exhibition of myself.

I sought a quiet corner where I could sit unnoticed, but after a while—I hardly know how long—found this solitude the worst of all; for thoughts crowded upon me, jostling like the dancers before me, twisting in circles and crossing and recrossing each other till I seemed unable to catch a single consecutive idea and fancied I was going mad. The heat of the room, the flare of the lights, the ceaseless movement and the unresting sounds became a kind of nightmare. I felt that I might very well fall into a fit of vapors, even so far substantiate my girlish character as to swoon!

I rose then and made my way up-stairs, unnoticed, to a room on the first floor, the door of which stood open. It was a small study, sparsely lit; its windows were ajar; it was dim, cool—a haven. There was a table set for cards; near the window stood a big leather screen and behind it an armchair. Nothing could suit me better. There I sat me down and strove to take hold of all my manhood.

It is a terrible moment in any one's life if he has to call himself a coward in order to spur his soul to evil, but there is a worse moment—and I was to experience it—when the evil strength comes. The voice of conscience is easy to hush—alas, in our fallen nature; I began to feel an impatience, even a desire, to get my work done. I knew that, since Bonaparte was expected, supper would not be served without him. He had not appeared when I left the ballroom. Of that I was certain.

"As soon as the music stops," I said to myself, "I will go down. That will be my moment."

I pressed the little bottle against my chest and—how easy is the descent! I had actually an angry fear lest the Corsican should fail at the party, after all.

The band was playing a very lively measure, something Neapolitan, I believe, that went with a rattle as of tambourines, little taps of a drum and a great thrumming of strings, with now and again the bizarre notes of the triangle. The door of the card-room being open, the sounds rose very distinctly from below, which was the cause, I suppose, of my not perceiving that any one had entered until I heard conversation close to me.

"Heavens," a voice was saying, "what a heat. My good Marbot, fetch me a glass of water."

I stepped out from behind the screen. By some super-sense I knew my hour and my man. Two black dominoes, masked, stood in the middle of the room. The shorter, squarer of the two removed his mask, and I beheld the pallid clear face already familiar from end to end of the world—the countenance of the Conqueror!

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He looked at me—it was the glance before which kings already trembled—drew his brows together in the most awful frown I had ever seen; then he turned to his companion, who, as I have said, was still masked, snapped his fingers and shrugged his shoulders. The movements were rough but not common. I had annoyed him, as the mosquito annoys the lion, by my mere presence. Though he did not speak a word, the language of gesture was, Italian fashion, perfectly eloquent.

Under that frown, that air of power, I felt it even an effort to walk by him—I, who meant to kill him!

He that was called Marbot stood back to let me pass, an unexpected courtesy in a republican. But I heard both men laugh as I went out of the room. No doubt there was something comic in what the *marquise* called my *tournure*.

I did not hesitate. A conviction was upon me that the spirit of malice to whom I had surrendered myself so determinedly a little while ago would see me through my awful task. A hurried step behind me told that Marbot was upon his errand. I gave him the lead to the refreshment room and there asked for a glass of water.

Marbot instantly stood at my side.

"Allow me," said he, "to help you, *Bergère*." As he spoke, he laid hold of a carafe and, pouring out two tumblers, presented me with one.

He bowed as he handed it. I thought his manners very good.

As I took it from him, two immense creatures dressed as Highlanders approached him. It was in the purest French, however, that one of these individuals addressed Marbot, speaking very low.

"Can Capitaine Marbot answer for the wholesomeness of that water?"

THE question sent an icy current through my veins. But my companion, removing his mask and displaying an ingenuous, singularly youthful countenance, laughed as he replied:

"*Mais, mon Dieu!* I hope so. I have taken it from one of those decanters placed for the use of every one."

The Highlanders stepped back, and we two, each carrying our water, walked back again toward the stairs side by side.

"The consul is well guarded by his secret police," said the young man to me. "Yet who that loves France would be base enough to harm him?"

"Who, indeed?" I echoed.

My voice was as hoarse as a crow's. I thought he must guess that it was no woman who answered him.

I went up the stairs before him, and, as I did so, contrived to extract the little bottle from its hiding-place and secrete it in my left hand. Just as we reached the top, one of my high heels doubled beneath me: I swear it was not done on purpose; I was an instrument, not a free agent at that moment.

Marbot made a bound to support me; I lurched against him; his tumbler fell from his hand. As he turned instinctively and ran down after it, I emptied the poison into the water I held and thrust the vial, loose stopper and all, back under my kerchief. My hand did not shake. I had no quiver of the nerve, no mist before my eyes. The water in my glass looked as clear as ever. Anne-Xavier had told me as much—"the poison will be colorless, odorless and tasteless. It will not act within ten minutes."

"Take my tumbler, Black Domino," said I.

Marbot did not hesitate to accept the offer:

"You're a thousand times too amiable, *Bergère*," said he gallantly, "but I can not refuse. Our little great man up yonder, it is not good to keep him waiting!"

"I am no longer thirsty," said I, and my voice cracked again.

I wanted to add, "It will give me far more refreshment to behold the hero refreshed," but I did not dare speak.

He went forward with the glass blithely—it was evident that he was of true soldier make; there was nothing of the diplomatist, still less of the *policier*, about him. Suspicion would not enter his simple soul.

I pursued him to the door of the card-room. I had to see the deed accomplished. It seemed to me suddenly that it would be the depth of cowardice were I to endeavor to escape now. Then I remembered that I had left my crook by the side of the armchair. It was a perfect excuse. I entered.

Bonaparte was sitting by the card-table, the full glass beside him. He had thrown off his domino, undone the kerchief at his

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neck and was flourishing a handkerchief in his hand. There was a strong scent of *Eau de Cologne* in the room. He looked very tired, but the fierce frown had gone. His expression was gentle.

"I left my crook—" I stammered, my tones hoarser than ever.

He smiled and made a gesture inviting me to approach.

It was that smile undid me. Never have I seen anything sweeter on human countenance, anything more beautiful or more noble than the marble face thus irradiated. The evil spirit went out of me, and I stood aghast upon the edge of my contemplated crime.

To assassinate this man, so young, so great, who had already done such work for France, lifted her into glory abroad and purged her of infamy at home—it was a deed of black treachery to my country as well as of low private revenge! All the sophisms by which I had been persuaded to it fell from me. I wanted to leap forward and snatch the poisoned cup—to shout at least a warning; but I that had been so cool and swift for wrong-doing stood paralyzed in righteous impulse. I could not move; I could not utter.

Afterward I told myself that here was proof that the power of evil was stronger than the power of good, and yet—there is a better explanation: God works as He chooses. And, indeed, when I come to think of it—as I have many a time since, and often on bended knee—never was there clearer instance of the overruling of beneficent Providence. For, struck motionless and dumb as I was, my soul sprang within me and cried out in the most fervent prayer it had ever framed—

"My God, save him and save me!"

Then I saw Bonaparte fold his handkerchief into a long strip, dip it into the water, wring it back into the tumbler and spread the bandage on his forehead. He leaned his head against the cushion of the chair, murmuring to Marbot,

"This will refresh me."

Marbot looked at me, gave me in his turn a good smile with white, strong teeth and said encouragingly:

"Find your crook, Shepherdess, and be quick, for I think he will sleep."

I got my property somehow and somehow conveyed myself out into the corridor.

Marbot seemed to notice nothing strange about me, but I know I staggered as I walked. Probably he thought I was overwhelmed with awe of the Corsican's personality. He certainly went in considerable awe himself.

I found my way to another empty cardroom, and there I shed tears of pure happiness. No moment in all my life, either before or since, brought me so near paradise. The reprieved criminal on the scaffold could taste nothing like it, for what was granted to me was the reprieve from crime itself.

BEFORE I put on my mask again and prepared to go down to the ballroom to join the elderly goddess, I made four resolutions, all of which I kept, though some of them required a considerable amount of courage to put into practise.

The first was to leave the house of Madame de Blois-Fontaine next day, ostensibly for England, still, of course, in my rôle of Herminie. That was easy both in prospect and accomplishment.

The second was to resume my rightful sex and find somewhere in Paris shelter and board; a less easy task, but, as I was fairly well furnished with money, it was successfully carried out.

The third took all my manhood. I wrote a letter to my brothers in La Vendée, breaking with them all utterly; yes, even from Herminie. I could not go back to them. I sickened from the thought of them as part of that horror I had so nearly wrought.

The fourth was to enlist in the army and devote myself heart and soul, body and spirit, to the service of new France.

Very few people were ever aware that the General Thibault who became Napoleon's aide-de-camp and was treated by him with such special kindness to the very end was once the little cadet of the house of Juvigny. Still less did Napoleon himself guess that he who sat at his right hand, shared counsel and board—aye, and bivouac—with him and more than once, certainly, saved his life, at considerable risk to his own, had plotted to poison him and in the guise of a Red Shepherdess had very nearly succeeded.

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Peep-Eye

by

Hapsburg Liebe

Author of "Big Balsam Joe," "One Lone Man," etc.

IT IS a little understood paradox that the things that seem farthest apart and most at variance in life often lie closest together and are nearest akin. One finds grief nosing into the realm of joy and joy nibbling at the toes of grief.

Mr. "Brimstone" Stratton, blue-white terror of the Little Pigeon River logging country, but a clean man for all his buck-wildness and rollicking badness, was very hard hit over having to give up all thought of becoming the husband of one Miss Angelina Murrell. He proceeded to celebrate the fatality by going to the nearest lowland town and smashing up things in general, which in a small way included a couple of policemen and the high sheriff's favorite deputy.

Brimstone succumbed not to the divers arms of the law. But he did go down finally before the onslaught of divers glasses of clear new whisky in massed formation, whisky that had never been contaminated by a revenue stamp. When he awoke in the gray dawn of the following morning, he beheld bars of iron limned between his eyes and the dim light; and he laughed as if it were a rare good joke somebody had put over on him.

Stratton was a large young man, and the narrow bed creaked under his weight when he sat up and put his feet to the floor. Being a total stranger to remorsefulness, Brimstone continued to laugh; he never regretted, simply because it was useless to regret. Then he fastened his big brown eyes on a red brick in one of the four walls of his cell and said softly to himself this in his own native drawl:

"I'll drink no more moonshine. Moonshine's stronger'n the strongest man. It's old Samson's master, shore. It slipped up on me and knocked me down flat, and all they had to do to jail me was jest to tote me in. I'll drink no more moonshine."

This is a very good place to record the fact that he never did.

When he had paid his fine, he hadn't a cent left. The judge narrowly suggested an immediate change of air for him, and Brimstone forthwith started for the logging country of the Little Pigeon.

For all of the bigness of this booted and broad-hatted, blue-shirted and corduroyed logger, he made a rather forlorn-looking picture as he climbed the little city's eastern hill on his way to the piled-up blue mountains that had always been home to him. Brimstone Stratton's lot was exceedingly hard now. Everywhere he went, they knew him, and it was the same; the people feared him because of his reputation as a fighter and because of his terrible strength.

The time was past when he could have friends for friendship's sake. Even Angelina Murrell, the one person he knew who hadn't been afraid of him, the one person in the world who had liked him genuinely and understood him, had broken off all relations with him; the everlasting nagging of

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her parents was responsible for that. Stratton was now almost as much alone as if he were the only living man.

The road led him past the little city's orphanage, a big old brick house that stood in a grove of trees on the crest of that eastern hill. A high picket fence ran around the spacious grounds. Stratton knew that this was a home for orphaned children, and he gave it a sympathetic glance—and at the same time he caught sight of a pair of strikingly clear and bright, belligerent and defiant topaz eyes peeping through the closely built fence and straight at him.

"Peep-Eye!" grinned Brimstone, without knowing or caring whether it was a boy or a girl.

"Go to the devil!" came immediately from beyond the pickets in a high-pitched and angry voice.

Stratton's grin widened beautifully. It was a boy who had spoken, a whole boy, and his heated words were as sweet music to the big timberjack's ears. Here, at last, was somebody with courage enough to order him peremptorily off to the devil, somebody who wasn't afraid of him, and it was distinctly refreshing!

"Good stuff, little 'Peep-Eye,'" smiled Brimstone. "You're shore all to the mustard. Are ye a orphant, Peep-Eye?"

The lad pressed closer to the pickets. In Brimstone Stratton he was now recognizing instinctively a kindred soul and a friend. Stratton went to the fence and looked over, and the spectacle that greeted his gaze tempted him strongly to let out a regular bellow of a laugh—but he didn't. Peep-Eye was about thirteen, sunburned and freckled and barefooted, and he wore a little girl's freshly-laundered gingham frock in lieu of a waist and short trousers!

The light on the youthful face was the light of deep and utter tragedy, and it was because of the frock he had been forced to wear.

"Sort uh half-orphant, yeuh," he said amicably enough. "I—I fell into a tub o' water and got wet all over, and I didn't have no other clo'es, and that woman she went and put a gyurl's dress on me ontel my own clo'es gits dry! I hate this here place, mister—take me away with ye, mister, please?"

Stratton's lips tightened. That boy's drawling talk was much like his own; he knew that the lad, too, was one of the mountain-born.

"Don't they treat ye square, son?" Stratton asked.

"Oh, yeuh," the boy answered. "The woman does, as much as she can and knows how. But these here kids, they don't. They're all afeard o' me, a-sayin' it's wicked to fight, and they all runs when they sees me a-comin'! And so I ain't got no friends, nary one. My pap, he teached me to fight. I've done thrashed all o' the big boys here, but I wouldn't fight the teeniest boys and the gyurls, o' course. My pap, he's went to the penitenchy. The law it sent him there for a-makin' whisky on his own still out o' his own cawn—and it ain't right! What might be ye name, mister?"

"They calls me Brimstone," smiled Stratton, "acause they thinks I'm pizen mean. What's yores, son?"

"Finley. Bub Finley. I'd work hard for ye, Mr. Brimstone. I can see ye're a logger-man by ye boots and the spikes in 'em. Please take me back wi' ye, Mr. Brimstone?"

The slender little figure in incongruous gingham stretched itself eagerly upward on its tiptoes. One of its hands held to the top of the fence, and the other slipped through and caught one of Stratton's.

"Please?" he begged.

A look of deep interest settled over the timberjack's now very sober countenance. They were in the same fix, he and this lad. They were friendless and alone; they were outcasts. The spirits of human charity and human devilment rose together to the size of a horse within Brimstone Stratton then, and he coolly and masterfully reached downward and got the boy, lifted him to his great shoulder and with him marched off toward the dim-blue ranges. And nobody saw him go.

"You'll be my pal, little Peep-Eye," he said half a dozen times on that rugged journey of twenty miles into the heart of the mountain wilderness. He liked the nickname, and the boy Finley offered no objections to it. "You'll be my pal, little Peep-Eye."

JUST after nightfall the pair arrived at Stratton's old working-place, "Super" Tom Wilmarck's camp on Pistol Creek, the latter-named stream being a dashing and turbulent

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tributary of dashing and turbulent Little Pigeon River. With Peep-Eye Finley still on his giant shoulder, Brimstone Stratton strode proudly into the camp's dimly lighted commissary. A dozen lounging timberjacks, all of them big and booted and broad-hatted men, gaped in astonishment as Brimstone stood the gingham-clad lad on the counter and hailed the superintendent himself:

"Hey, Super Tom, put some decent clo'es on this little man and give him a blanket and charge the same to me." Then to the gaping loggers: "This here is Peep-Eye Finley, fellers, and he's the new bully o' the Pistol Creek outfit. Do ye git me?"

They got him. Wilmarck, too, got him. Wilmarck, a big and silent, bearded man, began at once to take down what he had in boys' clothing.

If Peep-Eye had eaten all the red-striped commissary candy the Pistol Creek crew bought for him during his first hour in camp, he would have been a very sick boy. Before bedtime of that night Stratton built for his youthful pal a narrow bed close beside his own in the sleeping-quarters of Super Tom's men in the up-stairs of the big and rough boarding-house.

Brimstone had named Peep-Eye bully of the outfit. And bully Peep-Eye became as the Summer drifted on. What the lad wanted, he took—pocket-knives, pencils, bits of jewelry; anything Peep-Eye wanted, he took. And Brimstone Stratton, watching smilingly from his little distance off, saw that no man openly frowned over the loss of anything the boy had fancied. It was a pretty tyranny!

When Peep-Eye Finley had been a high light in Super Tom Wilmarck's outfit for five weeks, he was meeting up with Miss Angelina Murrell very frequently in the deep green, virgin forest that lay below the camp and not far from the Murrells' big old hewn-log cabin. Peep-Eye did not yet know why it was that Angelina so often asked him questions concerning Brimstone Stratton; and nothing the boy reported led the girl to believe that Brimstone was in the least unhappy, which occasioned a tiny wonderment on Angelina's part. Stratton now had a chum in the person of one Wilson Bannard, a newly arrived big logger who hailed from nobody save himself knew where and who feared neither Brimstone nor any other man that walked on two legs.

Then the boy Finley awoke one sticky-warm morning in August to find twenty silver dollars in one of the pockets of his trousers. As usual, he had slept late, and the loggers had gone to the woods; Super Tom, too, had gone to the woods. Not being on especially good terms with the camp cooky, Peep-Eye had his breakfast in silence, after which he went out, found a long ironweed and stripped it of its leaves and imagined it was a horse, mounted it and galloped off toward the cabin home of the Murrells to tell Angelina of his good fortune in the matter of the twenty dollars.

He came upon barefooted Angelina wading in the creek some two hundred yards above her father's house. The girl, verily, was an amazingly pretty nymph of the woods, as straight as a young birch and round of figure if slim. Somehow she seemed worried now, but she smiled at Peep-Eye's coming.

Little Finley dropped his "horse" and drew from his pocket the twenty pieces of silver.

"Looky here, Angie!"

Angelina Murrell had halted at the edge of the crystal stream. At sight of the money, she stepped backward as if struck.

"How'd you come by that, Peep-Eye?" she asked in a small, pinched voice.

"Mr. Brimstone—" always he called Stratton that— "Mr. Brimstone, o' course! Who else'd gi' me twenty dollars, Angie?"

Jephthah Murrell's daughter shook her head slowly and sorrowfully. She crumpled down to the creek's mossy bank, and the lad dropped beside her.

"What's got wrong o' you, Angie?" he drawled wonderingly.

"It must ha' been Brim," Angelina muttered gloomily, speaking wholly to herself.

Peep-Eye began to crowd the silver dollars back into his pocket.

"Who? What?" he wanted to know.

She turned her gaze full upon his sunburned boyish face, and her brown eyes were filled with deep shadows of disappointment.

"Ain't you heerd, Peep-Eye? I thought everybody knowed about it," she said. "The robber—it must ha' been Brim. The robber that held up the Crooked Creek outfit's pay-roll messenger and the Tumblin' Fork outfit's pay-roll messenger, late

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yeste'day. Whoever it was, my daddy said, shot the Tumblin' Fork man and hurt him bad——"

While the boy stared as if the thing were too big for him to understand, she went on with it, and now she was speaking wholly to herself again:

"What with him not havin' any friends, and with everybody allus sayin' he was borned to be hung, and with—with me throwin' him down to satisfy the mouthin' of other people—I know he did l-l-like me! I cain't find it in me to blame him very much. Ef I had it to do over, maybe I—I wouldn't throw him down, don't matter what other folks says about him!"

Peep-Eye grasped it in a fair way after a long minute of thinking.

"Mr. Brimstone didn't have any money yeste'day mornin'," said Peep-Eye. "I know he didn't, acause I axed him for five cents, and I never got it. But—it shore couldn't ha' been him ut done the robbin', Angie. Mr. Brimstone ain't no robber, Angie."

The laurels behind the two suddenly parted, and Brimstone Stratton, keen-eyed and a little hard of countenance, stood towering over them. It was almost as if he had come to answer for himself. Angelina Murrell turned her sunny-brown head and saw him, blushed somewhat and rose. The boy, grinning happily, also went to his feet.

"Seein' you go off down here every day sort o' made me wonder what the reason of it was, Peep," Stratton said coolly, smiling a tiny, whimsical smile. "So I follered ye this time, and I've seed what the reason was. You belong to me, Peep-Eye, and you mustn't never come off down here any more."

The lad would have asked "Why?" had not Angelina beaten him to it.

"I like little Peep-Eye, Brim," she said plaintively. "Why cain't he come down here to see me?"

"Ef ye don't mind, Angie, we'll pass that up," muttered Stratton, turning away. He was a trifle pale now. "Come on, Peep. And, ef ye leave the camp any more, see to it ut ye goes up the creek and not down——"

"Wait, Brim!" the girl broke in smotheredly, and the big hillman halted and faced back to her. "Brim," she hurried on eagerly, "please tell me: was it you—was it you held up them two pay-roll messengers yeste'day? You'll gi' me the truth, Brim, I know, and I won't never, never tell."

He looked her searchingly in the eyes for a silent moment; then he smiled again that tiny, whimsical smile of his.

"Are ye shore ye won't never tell?" he asked.

"Never!"

"Well—yes, it was me, Angie," he said. "Everybody allus expected me to be hung, ye know, and I cain't bear to disapp'int 'em."

He took the hand of little Finley and turned once more for the thick, green wall of laurels. But, before he reached it, the laurels opened, and from them stepped an eavesdropper, a man who had just heard him admit that he was the pay-roll's thief, a man who wore a shining star on the left breast of his officer-blue coat!

"Hello—Alford!" Stratton exclaimed awkwardly.

Sheriff Alford smiled a cocksure, official smile.

"I had an idea it was you, Brimstone," he said. "I had just reached the camp when I saw you sneaking down the creek; I decided to shadow you just to see what you were up to."

"You shore done a good job," clipped Stratton. "It ain't many men——"

"Up with your hands, Brimstone," cut in the officer.

Angie gasped. She saw a revolver flash in the hands of the lowland sheriff; she saw the glitter of manacles and heard them clink—then there came a roar that seemed to shake the earth beneath her feet, and powder smoke hung between her eyes and everything else.

When the smoke had cleared away, Angelina found herself standing there alone. There was nothing to tell her what had become of Brimstone Stratton or the boy or Sheriff Alford; the three of them had disappeared completely.

"Peep-Eye!" she called in a voice that trembled. "Peep-Eye!"

Still again she called, and she had no answer. The song of a wood-thrush in a near-by thicket and the gurgling of the creek that flowed behind her were the only sounds that broke the peaceful Summer silence.

Angelina sank down to the ground and covered her face with her hands.

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ONE hour later big Stratton and little Finley halted at a point high on the side of the mountain that rose back of old Jephthah Murrell's hewn-log house and sat down to rest. The hurried climb had winded them; their pulses raced, and they were panting hard.

Soon Brimstone turned to the boy at his side.

"I don't know," he said frowning, "why I brung you along, Peep. But, now ut I got ye here, I can use ye, I reckon. Take this here back to Sheriff Alford, Peep."

From inside the waistband of his corduroy trousers he drew the officer's revolver. He had thrust its barrel upward, causing its discharge; then he had wrested it from Alford's grip, snatched the boy up in one arm and fled like a buck deer. Alford had followed only to lose his man in the labyrinthine undergrowth, and just now he was walking slowly and beatenly into the camp clearing on the creek below.

"Don't ye want to keep the gun, Mr. Brimstone?" asked Peep-Eye.

Stratton smiled.

"Me carry a gun? Why, I ain't never needed a gun. Most gen'ally, it's cowards ut carries guns. Well, I reckon I'm outlawed now, Peep-Eye."

The boy took the heavy weapon in both hands. Stratton continued:

"Whenever it happens ye've got anything to tell me, son, maybe I could be found up here some'eres. Listen, son. Ef anybody down at the camp don't treat ye right, you tell him he's shore got a trimmin' a-comin' from Mr. Brimstone. Go ahead down to the sheriff, Peep."

Peep-Eye rose.

"I'm shore much obliged to ye for the twenty, Mr. Brimstone," he said. "I ain't never had——"

"The twenty?" Stratton interrupted. "Twenty what?"

"Twenty bucks — twenty hard iron boys—dollars. Them what I found in my pocket when I woke up this mornin', o' course," said Peep-Eye.

Brimstone Stratton shot to his feet. In a flash, a big part of the dastardly plot had become clear to him.

"The man ut done the robbin' belongs to the Pistol Creek outfit, shore, and he put that money in ye pocket to throw the blame on me!" growled Stratton. "Anybody knows it's easy to blame me with anything. Le' me see, Peep-Eye. It was a pow'ful big man ut made them hold-ups, they say, and the main big men on Pistol Creek is me and Wilse Bannard; Wilse Bannard, what set hisself up as a friend o' mine—it must ha' been him!

"And I owned up to a-doin' it, in the hearin' o' Sheriff Alford, like a fool; and I was a-blazin' bound'ries yeste'day and cain't prove a alibi! Wilse was a-choppin' by hisself yeste'day, and he cain't prove a alibi, either. I'm shore in for it ef ever I'm ketched, Peep. Well, son, ye've got my pe'mission to tell Wilse he's got a trimmin' a-comin' to him!"

The boy stared in wonderment at the logger.

"And so you never done it, Mr. Brimstone? You told Angie ye did!"

Stratton smiled just a little.

"I know I told Angie I did, but I didn't," he said. "I was ungodly mad, son, and it seemed like Angie was a-lookin' for me to say I done it, and I said it was me for pure spite. Go on down in the valley, Peep, and, ef ye see Angie, ye might tell her how it was. Goo'-by, ol' pal!"

Peep-Eye made his way slowly down the rugged steep, and not very long afterward he reached the logging-camp, found Sheriff Alford and gave him his revolver. Alford gave the boy Finley a grilling that yielded no worth-while information; then Peep-Eye stole away and put out for the Murrell cabin.

Angelina wasn't at home, and Peep-Eye couldn't find her.

Passed hours that were painfully long to the lad, and at last the sun went down. Came a supper that tasted like wood to little Finley, and, shortly after it was over, he again went toward the home of the Murrells.

The rambling old log house had a porch running its entire length on the front, and this porch was for the most part walled in thickly by honeysuckle vines. As Peep-Eye walked silently up the rain-guttered path that led from the split-paling gate to the steps, he caught the sound of voices coming from behind the dense screen of honeysuckles—and they were those of Angelina and Wilson Bannard.

Peep-Eye tiptoed closer, listening hard. Soon he made out this:

"Never thought he'd get up the nerve to try anything like that," in Bannard's bass tones. "But——"

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"I wouldn't never ha' believed it was him," Angelina interrupted, "ef he hadn't told me hisself. And I'm about halfway in the notion to not believe it now, Wilse."

Bannard laughed, and the boy at the steps misconstrued the meaning of that laugh; to Peep-Eye it had been born of derision instead of amusement. Peep-Eye's quick temper flared upward to the boiling-point; he sprang across the porch floor, confronted Wilson Bannard and threw the twenty silver dollars by handfuls straight into his face.

"You've got it a-comin' to you, all right!" he stormed, atremble with boyish rage. "When Mr. Brimstone gits through with you, you're a-goin' to look like a polecat what's been into a sausage-grinder—you low-down sneakin', thievin' dawg!"

Bannard had gone to his feet. The silver pieces, the fierce verbal thrust of Stratton's boy—they had come like a thunderbolt. He shot out a great hand and gripped one of Peep-Eye's slender shoulders in a hard grip and seemed about to shake him. Angelina went to her feet and took a step toward the two, and her eyes shone like highly polished topazes.

"Don't ye dare to hurt him, Wilse," she warned; "don't ye dare to do it. I reckon it's time for ye to go, Wilse. Right now."

Bannard took his hand from Peep-Eye's shoulder, looked toward the girl and moistened his lips as if to speak.

"Right now," Angelina repeated sharply.

Pistol Creek's big new logger quietly picked up his broad-rimmed hat and went without a word.

When the gate had clicked behind him, Angelina Murrell sat down in a sheepskin-lined rocker and drew the boy to her side. They had a long talk, in which Peep-Eye told Angelina all he knew to tell. Toward the end of it the girl summed the matter up very calmly in this:

"Accordin' to what my dad says, the' ain't but two men on Pistol Creek that fits in with a description o' the robber—he had his face masked, o' course—and them's Brim Stratton and Wilse Bannard. We know it wasn't Brim, for he's said it wasn't; but we cain't prove it wasn't! Not now, anyways. Everybody is sayin' this about him: 'I told ye so! I told ye so!' Peep-Eye, you like him a lot, and I l-l-like him a lot, and it's a big debt for us both. Ef you'll he'p me, honey, I think—I hope—we can clear him. Will ye he'p me, little Peep-Eye?"

"Will I!" cried the lad. "Angie, ye'd as well ax a goose do it eat grass. O' course, I will. What must I do fust, Angie?"

Jephthah Murrell's daughter smiled pleasedly.

"You can come here soon in the mornin'," she half whispered, "and le' me give ye a little bundle o' somethin' to eat to take up to Brim. And ye can tell him this for me: I'll stick to him while the breath o' life is in me, ef the whole world puts its foot on him. Now pick up them twenty dollars and keep 'em for Brim, honey. They might he'p us a heap."

Brimstone Stratton received both the bundle of food and the message before the next day's sun was two hours high, and, hungry as he was, the message counted for a million times more than the food.

THE middle of the afternoon of that same day had not passed when there came to Pistol Creek news of the death of the Tumbling Fork pay-roll messenger. This meant that the reward for Brimstone would be heavy and that officers would soon be searching the hills for him. Big and silent Super Tom Wilmarck called the boy Finley into his cubby-hole of an office, which was in a corner of the commissary building, and advised him to find Stratton and tell him to be on his guard.

"If he's caught," growled Super Tom, "he's gone. He'll make a break for North Carolina if he's wise."

Peep-Eye stood there beside Wilmarck's scarred desk and stared. Finally he asked Wilmarck—

"Do you think Mr. Brimstone done it?"

"I do not," came readily. "He was mad at the girl, and he said he was the robber just for spite. It was the biggest fool thing a man ever did, and yet it was nothing more than human; but you could never convince a jury of his innocence, because of his reputation. I have a pretty good idea who it was that pulled off the two hold-ups, but it would be nearly impossible to get any evidence against him."

Peep-Eye bent closer to Super Tom.

"It was Wilse Bannard," said Peep-Eye.

Wilmarck's sober gaze narrowed.

"I think so, too. But we mustn't let him know we suspect him, if we ever hope to catch him and clear Brimstone. Better

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hurry and tell Brimstone about the Tumbling Fork man, Peep-Eye, and give him a chance to get away."

Little Finley found Stratton on Murrell's Mountain and delivered breathlessly the news that he had come to deliver. Stratton dropped to a stone and began to gaze longingly down toward the log cabin home of his Angelina.

"Don't matter what happens, I ain't a-goin' to leave her; I ain't guilty, and I ain't a-goin' to run," he said solemnly. "You go down and tell her, little Peep-Eye. And 'en you go to Super Tom and tell him to send me a gun and a belt o' fifty ca'tridges. I shore ain't a-goin' to leave Angie, and I dies with both boots on and laced clean to the top when I dies."

Angelina cried a little about it when the boy told her. Then Peep-Eye hastened to the logging-camp and found Super Tom, and Super Tom slyly sent back to Brimstone Stratton a belt filled with cartridges and a very dependable Army-type revolver.

"Give him my regards," frowned Wilmarck.

A week passed, and during those seven days the high sheriff and half a dozen deputies combed the hills in the Little Pigeon River logging country, posting many reward notices, without ever once seeing their man. Angelina had worried herself half sick, partly because she thought Brimstone must be starving; and Peep-Eye Finley pined unceasingly for another glimpse of his god. Then, purely for purposes of camouflage, Sheriff Alford gave it out that he was through with the chase.

He and his party rode back toward the lowland on a Saturady, and they had not covered a mile when Peep-Eye appeared at Jephthah Murrell's front gate and whistled in an almost correct imitation of the cry of a screech-owl. Angelina heard the signal and hastened softly out to him, and she carried a bundle of cooked food in her pretty, fidgety hands. With a sly backward glance she let herself through the gateway, and the two plunged into the laurel-filled woodland.

"What ef we cain't find him?" muttered the boy as Angelina caught his hand to help him along.

"The' ain't no 'efs' about it," she answered determinedly. "We've got to find him."

At a point half-way up the steep mountainside they halted to rest for a moment. Angelina's topaz eyes roamed idly along the lowland trail, which lay like a dirty white ribbon, running up and down, up and down, leading into the hazy west. The sheriff and his men were already out of sight in the foot-hills.

Then she made out the dim figure of a lone horseman riding out of a deep ravine, and she clutched Peep-Eye's arm and pointed.

"Look, little Peep-Eye," she murmured, "who's that?"

The lad, too, saw the horseman.

"I don't know," said he. "Maybe it's——"

Angelina interrupted:

"It's the Blackfern camp's pay-day, and that's the Blackfern's pay-messenger. What ef—what ef he was to be held up!"

Peep-Eye's heart leaped at the thought. From their place on that high eminence the pair watched breathlessly as the Blackfern man and his mount seemed to crawl like a big ant over the crooked trail below them. Suddenly Angelina's grip tightened nervously on little Finley's arm, and she pointed toward a spot near the base of Murrell's Mountain and half a mile ahead of the messenger.

"Look!" she cried smotheredly.

Peep-Eye was already looking. Peep-Eye saw a big man in the clothing of a timberjack, who was creeping down a spur of Murrell's Mountain toward the lowland trail.

"It's Wilse Bannard, Angie!" he declared.

"And he's there to hold up the pay-roll man!" tremulously whispered Jephthah Murrell's daughter.

They held their gaze riveted on the booted and broad-hatted, corduroyed figure until it had disappeared over the brink of a low cliff that rose at the upper and nearer side of the trail. Then Angelina put down the bundle of food that she had been carrying, and they started for the cliff, moving rapidly and almost noiselessly. If they could only catch Wilson Bannard in the act of holding up the pay-roll messenger, it would go a long way toward establishing the innocence of Brimstone Stratton!

TEN minutes later they were crawling silently out on the laurel-fringed cliff, and the Blackfern man was riding within a hundred yards of them. They parted the laurels that grew on the

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brink and peered over, and they saw, directly below them, standing hidden in a corner of the little precipice—the highwayman!

He had just finished knotting a wide blue bandanna about his features. Judging from his size and his clothing, it might have been either Bannard or Stratton—and to Angelina it somehow looked a trifle more like Stratton! With bated breath she watched for some little trick of manner that would betray the unknown's identity, but she went unrewarded. Then the robber drew a revolver from under his corduroy coat.

At sight of the ugly weapon Angelina felt strangely helpless. She turned her eyes appealingly toward the boy at her side. There came to her ears at that instant a rapid jumble of hoof-beats from the trail below and to the left; the messenger had seen the rim of the highwayman's hat, and he was wheeling his horse and digging spurs into its sides. She looked again toward Peep-Eye, and this time she saw him poising a stone—which was as much as he could lift—straight over the robber's head!

Peep-Eye Finley let go the stone, and it crashed down to its mark. The big unknown man crumpled like a wet rag and lay there in a heap. His revolver fell full six feet from his hand.

"I got him!" jubilated the lad. "I got him!"

"You've killed him!" gasped Angelina, white in the face, her eyes wide and burning. "Peep-Eye, honey, you—you've killed him!"

She peered hard downward. The broad-rimmed hat and the blue bandana kept the unknown's identity a secret still. She looked for some sign of the Blackfern camp's pay-roll messenger; he was gone; he was riding fast for the lowland and the sheriff. She and the boy were alone there in the mountain wilderness—with that!

Angelina could not bear the sight of it now. She was overcome with the horror of it all.

"Killed him!" Peep-Eye repeated in a faraway voice. It was too big a thing for his childish mind to grasp easily. "Killed him!"

"We'll go home and tell my dad," Angelina said somehow pitifully. "He'll know what to do."

Hand in hand they started for Pistol Creek.

But Jephthah Murrell was not at home, and they hurried on to the logging-camp above. Saturday afternoons being half-holidays in the Summer months, the Pistol Creek timberjacks were lounging on the long, boarding-house porch, and they stared wonderingly as the girl and the boy came running across the clearing. Angelina's face reflected tragedy, and the loggers rose to hear what it was that she had to tell them.

Peep-Eye began to unburden himself almost before Angelina had the opportunity.

"I killed Wilse Bannard," he said just a little desperately, "and ye can go and git him ef ye want him. I drapped a big rock——"

A bass voice interrupted him—

"You're mistaken, son, I'm pleased to say!"

And Bannard himself walked down the porch steps!

Angelina halted, swayed, seemed about to fall. She caught to the slender shoulder of Peep-Eye. The lad choked—it had been either Bannard or Stratton, they had said—then he had done for Stratton instead of Bannard!

The heart of Angelina was riven by the same bitter thought. She sank to her knees and sobbed.

In his masterful way, Wilson Bannard began to take hold of things at once. Brokenly Angelina told him the bare gist of the story, and he urged her to believe that the robber was only unconscious. Then he summoned together half a dozen other men and led them toward the scene of the attempted hold-up.

Of the pair who were grief-stricken, it was the boy who pulled his wits about him first. He helped Angelina to her feet and went with her across the camp clearing into the green woodland and to a fern-lined spot under a tree that grew beside the babbling creek, and there they sat down together. Not very long afterward Bannard and his party returned, and Angelina and her youthful companion peered through the scrub and saw dimly that four of them carried a big, raglike form. The girl rose, took one step toward them, halted and sank to the ground with her hands over her eyes.

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HALF an hour passed, and there came suddenly the splashing of booted feet in the stream beside them. Angelina lifted her tear-stained face, then sprang up with a glad cry. It was Brimstone Stratton, who was as much alive as ever!

"Brim!" she said. "Brim!"

"What's the rucus, Angie?" asked Stratton. "I've come down to find out."

Hastily she told him.

"So it wasn't Wilse!" he exclaimed. "Then, by George, le's go and see who it was!"

The three of them hurried to the boarding-house. The unconscious highwayman had been placed on a bed in the downstairs of the rough building, and the room was crowded with timberjacks. Brimstone entered first, and he cleared the way for the two who followed on his heels. Bannard was in charge; he stood over the still figure on the bed and watched closely for a sign of returning life. Stratton and the girl and Peep-Eye pressed forward, saw and cried out in their amazement.

"Super Tom!" bellowed Stratton. "Who'd ever ha' thought it. It ain't no wonder he didn't want me to be ketched—it'd ha' queered his game! Not a-havin' a goat, he'd 'a' had to quit!"

At that Wilmarck opened his eyes, saw Brimstone and frowned. Bannard gave Stratton a meaning look and turned back to the superintendent.

"How do you feel, Super Tom?"

Wilmarck lay there silent, sullen, with his teeth shut hard, not in the least ashamed or penitent, for another full minute. Then mingled shadows of pain and fear filled his deep-set eyes.

"My chest," he said weakly, "what's the matter with my chest, Bannard? Send for a doctor, can't you?"

"The nearest doctor is twenty miles away, and he couldn't do any more for you than I can," said Bannard, shaking his head. "Is there any word you'd like to leave, Super? And—er, where shall I ship your—er—what's your home address, Super Tom?"

Wilmarck's eyes widened. His face was a clean white now.

"Is it that bad?" he moaned. "I'm on fire in my chest, Bannard! Help me, Bannard, won't you?"

Again the big new logger shook his head. Wilmarck went on, resignedly now, his hands clutching at a broad bandage that Bannard had placed over his right lung.

"I guess you're right. I guess I'm cashing in. It doesn't matter what you do with my—my remains, Bannard; hang 'em up to the crows if you like. Before it's over, I'd like to say—to you, Brimstone—and to the rest of you—it was me that held up the Crooked Creek and the Tumbling Fork messengers and me that shot the Tumbling Fork man. The money is in my safe in the office."

He finished with a groan. Bannard laughed a loud laugh of triumph, bent over and took from Super Tom's chest a—mustard plaster!

"Made with turpentine," said he. "You'll live until you're hung, Wilmarck, at least. Boys, see that he doesn't get away; I must have a word with Brimstone."

He turned to Stratton and found himself facing Angelina Murrell and Peep-Eye Finley also.

"I inherited this logging-outfit," he explained, "and I came up here incognito to see why Wilmarck wasn't getting out more logs. You'd make a perfectly bully superintendent, Brimstone, and I'll give you the job on the condition that—" and here he pretty nearly winked—"you marry Angelina and continue to take care of Peep-Eye. What do you say, Brimstone?"

Stratton looked anxiously toward the girl who had said that she would stick by him as long as life was in her, though the world put its foot on him, and he saw her shyly nod. Peep-Eye found his tongue then, and he said with a happy grin—

"It's a good trade, Mr. Brimstone; take him up quick!"

Old Jephthah Murrell, smiling a trifle sheepishly, came pushing through the crowd and held out his hand to Stratton.

"That boy's a-giving ye good edvice, Brimstone," he declared.

The big hillman faced his employer again and smilingly tendered his grateful acceptance.

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Savages

A four-part Story
Part One

by Gordon Young

Author of "Heathens," "The Devil's Own," etc.

IN THE darkness the surf intoned its hoarse, cryptic chant. The moon, thin as a scimitar, had long ago slipped behind the clouds, and the stars no longer burned like distant, far distant, camp-fires. The bush stirred with rush of wind and rain; palms rattled their long leaves.

But dawn was coming. The man who sat alone in the rickety hut, his head propped against a clenched fist, knew that dawn was near. The watch lying before him in the yellow light of the lantern told him that the night was almost gone.

The rain pattered down. It rains two-thirds of the time in the Solomons. Day and night it rains, sometimes twice and three times in a day and night, sometimes only once—for twenty-four hours.

Gilbert Lang stirred uneasily as if awakening from a dream. But his eyes had not been closed. A book, almost worn to pieces with much handling, lay on the table. It had not been opened. Hour after hour he had sat, thinking. He had intended to read himself into drowsiness. If he could have put his hands on morphine, opium—anything—he would have used that instead, though he did not know the color of morphine and had been no closer to opium than to the odor. But either would have put him to sleep and made sleep dreamless.

He was a dark-eyed, slender, almost beautiful boy, singularly out of place in a native village on Bougainville Island. His face was clean-featured and delicate; his voice low and soft, each word distinctly pronounced when he spoke and every sentence unconsciously grammatical. A casual glance and one would call him a weakling. But a casual glance would have been misleading. His face among the wind-hewn faces of the South Seas was immature, boyish, almost girlish. And yet a close scrutiny, a thoughtful scrutiny, would have revealed something that was not immature.

The lips were molded as if by an artful sculptor: curved and firm. His chin was firm, and, though his jaws were lean, they were firm, strong and fairly bulged from the cheeks. The velvety brown eyes, which at times seemed soft as a girl's, often gleamed like a basilisk's.

Somewhere in the east the dawn leaked through the dripping clouds. A rooster from under a low sheltering eave announced the break of day, and others of his fellows crowed lustily. A dog barked in protest. Other dogs protested. Lean-legged, flat-sided pigs nosed about. A piercing squeal, followed by a mad, splattering scamper, told that some trusting porker had nosed too close to a sleepy dog.

Chickens came from such roosting-places and shelters as they had found and scratched hopefully, though what feathers the greedy hands of little brown imps had left them drooped wet and bedraggled. Here and there from a doorway a black head was poked; black eyes indifferently scanned the sky, surveyed the street and disappeared.

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It takes something unusual for a native not to go back to his mats after he is first awakened. The rain fell steadily.

Gilbert Lang arose, put the watch into his pocket and blew out the lantern. He had wasted precious ounces of oil in the night hours, but he had not thought to put out the lantern. He had had something else to think of—always something else.

He went to the door, pushed back the matting reinforced with bamboo and looked out at the rain, at the empty streets, at the double row of shaggy huts. It was July; by count it had rained for twenty-six days—not continuously, but repeatedly. Squally rains and southeast winds. Everything was wet or damp; the village was dismal; the bush was miasmatic, fetid. Yet he contemplated the scene indifferently.

He was dressed in a dark cotton shirt and brown, khaki cloth trousers. Also, he wore shoes.

He picked up a small, square hand-mirror, hung it beside the door where it best caught the light, got out a shaving-mug and razor and carefully went over his face. Each morning he shaved. It, among others, was a habit that he had brought with him from the haunts of white men; besides, he liked the feeling of cleanliness that comes from a shave.

Then he took off his shirt and trousers and, wrapping a bath-towel around his loins, trotted to the beach and plunged into the surf. He had stopped to remove his shoes, but when he came out he put them on again, though they were as wet as if he had worn them into the water. But he knew what came from scratches: yaws, ulcers, tenacious as leprosy. And, when he came from the bath, he went carefully over his body, applying a strong carbolic solution to anything that looked like a break in the skin.

Effeminate it seemed. Finicky as a girl, a white girl with a boudoir. Perhaps. But he was the only white man who accompanied "Hurricane" Williams, and Williams was known as a terror from Guam to Broome, from Papeiti to—well, wherever the farthest missionary station to the east happened to be. Not that there was a mission station at Broome to swell the chorus of Williams' reputation. There was not.

Broome, with scarcely more then a thousand people in it, was the toughest port of all Australia's immense coast-line. Gilbert Lang was about the last man on earth those who knew Williams, or knew of him, would have thought likely to secure the good-will of him who was called a "hurricane".

It was all the more strange that Gilbert Lang should be with Williams, because this rover did not trust and scarcely associated with white men. Any of scores of good seamen and hard fighters would have eagerly sailed on Williams' sharp-nosed schooner—clipper-built schooner. Many of them would have shipped out of curiosity if for nothing more. Williams was suspected of almost everything from piracy to whisky-running, everything but blackbirding. A blackbirder is one who recruits native labor for the big plantations on Queensland, New Zealand and the Fijis or for the one big plantation on Tahiti.

But then that was explained by the phrase "nigger-lover." Williams was one. He had a swarm of Tongans and Samoans, men and women, boys and girls, who had followed his fortunes from the West until he was, by encroaching traders, missionaries and alert men-of-war, pushed clear across almost to the New Guinean coast.

Not that the swarm always accompanied him. But it was always ready to. And, what was more, men and women, boys and girls, would fight for him and with him. It required a very unusual personality to so beguile gentle Samoans from their fairyland into the cannibal-infested islands.

Moreover, Williams moved, if not by stealth, at least with extreme caution. He never made what are called "civilized" ports. He traveled without clearance papers, and any man of the sea knows what that means. Most men of the sea will say it is impossible. But such things as that did not seem to trouble Williams—as the impossible.

It was said, with that generous exaggeration which makes the meaning clear without deceiving any one, that he knew every fathom between the line and fifteen degrees south. He was elusive as a will-o'-the-wisp—or seemed so to various captains in the queen's navy who had instructions to look him up and find out his business. It was reported that a captain in the Kaiser's navy had also been taught a lesson and brought to a court martial when he undertook to carry out an oath that he would stick

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Williams' head—minus the body, of course—on the main truck, much the same as a Solomon Islander does with a new canoe.

As a matter of fact, the Germans, who own Bougainville—or did—seem to have learned much about the arts of war from the savages. At least, the islanders and the Germans are the two most cruel victors on earth, equally treacherous, and, if the islanders eat their captives, the Germans have made soap of their own dead. But the captain who wished to put Williams' head on the main truck was blessed with better luck than many captains had.

He caught sight of Williams one bright day when the wind was half a gale. The German carried both boilers and sail, but, the wind having been good and strong, the boilers were cold. Williams carried three masts, and the German, spreading every inch of canvas and getting up steam besides—in the landsman fashion of the sailing Germans in those days—gave chase, and what happened was that the German piled on a sunken reef, which up until that time was not on the chart.

After that little incident captains of the queen's and Kaiser's navy thought it best to catch Williams napping in some obscure port, but, those days being before wireless gave a tongue to every ship on the high seas, it was no easy matter to find trace of the suspected pirate, whisky-runner, smuggler and "nigger-lover."

GILBERT LANG, some few months before had sailed as a passenger out of Hawaii on a trader. Some say there are six — thousands of course — and some that there are sixty thousand islands in the South Seas. It depends on whether you count the little ones whose faces are washed by every gale-blown sea. Anyway, Gilbert Lang left Honolulu, intent upon a search of every island big enough to hold a woman's foot until his quest was ended. The trader cut across to the Carolines, and at Kusaie in Port Lottin he saw the schooner that Williams owned and heard of the man's reputation.

"Port Lottin," says the British Admiralty report, "is small but well sheltered."

Williams knew it before the Admiralty did. Besides, Kusaie was then a Spanish island, and the Spanish were rather lax and never over-anxious to help the queen's navy. So Williams was refitting what had looked like a barque into a schooner, and he was busy repainting what had been a black freeboard into a gray one with solid black gun-ports. In those days painted gun-ports were common among the ships that went toward the Solomons or up into the waters infested by Chinese pirates. He had already been to a beach suitable for the work, careened and scraped. But he had not yet decided on a name for the newly guised vessel.

"Mr. Williams," said Gilbert Lang when he had walked into the little camp where the Samoans and Tongans had settled themselves, "my name is Gilbert Lang. I'm from the States, and I want to go with you. I don't know the first thing about ships or sea, but I am willing to pay."

Williams was not a big man. He was not small. He wore no clothing except trousers cut off above the knees, and his skin was dark as a native's. His beard was short, as if cut away from time to time rather unevenly with shears, and his hair was much the same. Except for his gray eyes he might have been taken for a native.

Williams was squatting on his haunches eating a baked fish, with a side dish of taro paste and a dessert of coconut cream—which is different from milk—on baked breadfruit. He was eating with his fingers, and he squatted apart from the others.

He did not stand up but simply raised his face and looked hard at Gilbert Lang. Some one has said that Williams always looked like a leopard about to spring. He had not been called a hurricane for nothing. He sometimes sprang as the leopard springs—or with the suddenness and fury of a hurricane. And it was said to make little difference at whom or how many.

But Williams seemed listening even long after Gilbert Lang had spoken and stood silent, and, as he listened, he eyed the boy between narrowly contracted lids from which a light, sharp and gleaming as miniature lightning, flashed.

"Why?" came from Williams' lips.

Whenever he spoke to white men, the words seemed fairly to explode in his mouth.

"I am not a globe-trotter, Mr. Williams. I am not looking for adventure. I am looking for somebody, and I mean to find—to find the party or parties." Gilbert Lang said it in the low, musical, cultivated voice that ever characterized his speech.

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Williams looked up and down the slender, delicate body. Gilbert Lang stood poised in a kind of naive, unconscious, boyish grace. He could no more have concealed his gentle birth than he could have posed as an Irish mate. But there was something intense and earnest in his face.

"And then?" Williams snapped.

Gilbert Lang hesitated and started to speak. But he stopped. He fumbled with a thumb and finger in the watch-pocket of his trousers and brought out a signet-ring on which were strange characters.

"Well?" came that harsh tense voice.

Gilbert Lang, scarcely knowing what he was doing, feeling awkward and a little melodramatic, slipped the ring on his finger and held out the back of his hand. It was as if he wished to reveal something of which he could not, would not, speak.

Williams grasped the hand in his muscular fingers and peered long at the Greek inscription. Whether he understood it or not, Gilbert Lang did not know. Had he been less of a boy and known more of the world, he would never have tendered a phrase in Greek to a lawless rover of the South Seas as an explanation of his quest.

Williams dropped the hand and again stared at the delicate-featured boy. For some seconds he stared, then explosively though not loudly—but quickly, as with one flash of sound—the question burst:

"Man or woman?"

"Both—most probably," said Gilbert Lang.

"Your age?"

"I shall be twenty-two next month."

Williams, still squatting, fastened his eyes on the boy's face as a cobra fastens its fangs and for a long while seemed analyzing every line and feature.

"Gilbert Lang," he said, "I am an outlaw. Man-hated. No romance. Hard dirty work on a sea-drunk craft. Rotten grub. Yaws, itch and ringworms. Throw that ring in the ocean, go back to the States and forget it. I don't want you."

"No," said the boy quietly with a little sigh of disappointment. "I shall not go back. I will go on as best I can. All my life I will look, and some day—I don't know whether it will be God or the devil, but some day—they murdered my brother. My father died—his heart burst. My mother is insane. I have sworn——"

Williams held up a silencing hand.

"I don't want your confidences. Go to a priest if you must talk."

Gilbert Lang hung his head. He had promised himself to keep his lips closed and tell no one, but youth is congenitally indiscreet.

"Pardon me," he said, turning red. "I didn't mean to—to—talk of it to any one. But I was told you went from island to island, to more places than any other man. I know they came to some one of these islands."

Williams stood up. He called in the native tongue toward a group of his people who were feasting merrily thirty yards away, and two handsome young men raced toward him, playing as they came, and stood grinning while he continued to speak.

Then Williams said to Gilbert Lang:

"Go along with them. They'll get your traps ashore and bring them here."

THE trader tried to persuade Gilbert Lang not to link himself with the fortunes of Hurricane Williams. The trader repeated stories current throughout the South Seas. Williams might give him to some cannibal tribe for a feast—and sit down to that feast—in order to make friends with the chief. His own bunch of savages were a most immoral and thievish lot.

Why, had not Williams pitched bodily overboard a worthy Presbyterian deacon who came on board his ship once to hold services? Certainly he had! And wasn't this fellow Williams so much of a savage himself that he could go where scarcely an armed ship's company would dare venture? It was true, every word of it.

But, though it was "true," the trader had revealed it to Gilbert Lang in the privacy of a cabin and, finding the boy still stubborn, had made him promise not to breathe a word of what had been said to Williams himself.

"I don't want trouble with him," said the trader. "Not that I couldn't hold my own. But I am an honest, peaceable man."

The next day that honest, peaceable man sold for cash to Williams three barrels of spoiled pork—good pork having been laid for a few inches over the top—a dozen tins of ship biscuits, weevil-bitten, fifty cases of trade tobacco, two-thirds of which was sand and leaves, together with numerous other

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things, some of which were as represented. And the honest man hastily sailed away, no doubt in the interests of peace.

Gilbert Lang came into the camp, or rather a little village all in itself, and found much that interested and astonished him. First he was given a neat little hut all for himself. Next he was overwhelmed with generous visitors. Fish and coconuts were heaped before his door. Pretty dark girls, festooned with flowers, quarreled for the privilege of cooking for him; little imps shyly poked about and offered to show him the haunts of robber-crabs; young men and their elders dropped in to give him smiling greetings, and a woman old enough to be the mother of them all put the young coquettes to flight and took charge of his hut.

The irrepressible gaiety, the joy of living, in those people astonished Gilbert Lang and compared strangely with the grimness of Williams whom they worshiped. They sang and danced every evening, usually until far into the night. They wore no clothing but flowers, grass and leaves, and they seemed continually at play.

But he soon saw that there was method in their play. There were a hundred and a few more of them at Port Lottin—all following the fortunes of Williams. A small village in themselves, a hungry village. So everybody worked, though no one seemed to know it. Fish caught in immense numbers, and if the sun were hot they were dried and if not they were salted. Robber-crabs were dug from their lairs—the luscious meat served forth a feast; the fat tails were rendered into oil and stored away.

It was fine as an ointment, but he noticed that the men greased their tools with it, and every few days the rifles were overhauled and given a good rubbing. Everybody made sport of the work, but work they did. And at night they sang their heathen songs and danced their heathen dances, and sometimes Williams, grimly watching from the shadows, would break into a smile, joyful, happy, yet almost like revenge gratified, at the sight of his naked savages bounding about to the old, old heathen chants.

Williams let Gilbert Lang alone, seemed almost to ignore him. But, for that matter, Williams seemed almost to ignore everybody excepting Banoo, the son of a Tongan chief, and Nauma, an elderly Samoan chief, and to these he seemed only to give instructions. But no one stood in fear of him. The halfdozen brown imps between the ages of three and ten would bump into his legs while playing nor be alarmed when they saw whom they had nearly upset. Sometimes the girls would throw a garland about his neck and run away giggling, looking backward to watch him stand fingering the crimson and white blossoms.

In about three weeks after Gilbert Lang joined the village, it moved bodily on board the schooner, newly christened the *Mary*. Pigs and chickens and babies were stowed all over the deck. There scarcely seemed room to turn around at first, with everybody jostling and shouting. But again in the midst of chaos there was method. Everything about the deck was made fast, the anchor raised. The nimble sailors swarmed all over the rigging, working ropes and setting sail while Williams, Banoo and Nauma roared their orders; and the *Mary* was creeping through the narrow entrance before the natives had gone between decks to inspect their quarters, newly whitewashed.

Gilbert Lang came in due time to learn that Williams did not control his host—it seemed a host, piling about the deck of the schooner—and keep them contented by a miracle. Williams kept everybody busy and well fed. They were busy either at work or at play, and the former was always near like play. Gilbert Lang also came to see that there was nothing lax and shiftless in all that commotion; that duties had to be performed and performed well, but it was all play, with rewards of words of praise and punishments of ridicule and sarcasm that were quick to be taken up by the women and children and men.

There is a well-defined and acute, often severe, sense of humor in the South Sea natives, and Williams utilized it. He knew they all were sensitive as children, and he did not—as most of the white breed do—treat them with contempt or blows or disgusting, often evil, familiarity. He held aloof but preserved an attitude toward them as toward children.

When the *Mary* stood out to sea, Gilbert Lang, with a piccaninny in each arm, one tugging at his nose and the other doing its best to scramble out of his arm and overboard, stood on the poop watching the land recede. Williams turned, noticed him, called one of the girls to carry the babies to their mothers and told Gilbert Lang

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where he could find a cuddy cabin reserved for him.

Gilbert Lang went down the companion-way, but, not being familiar with ships, he was puzzled as to which was his. He opened a door and stepped inside. He did not at first realize that he had made a mistake but was interested in the many curious things he saw. Then, noticing a shelf of books, he was drawn to them as to a magnet, and his eyes scanned the remarkable list and settled on a large "Herodotus." Curiously he pulled it down. It was well-thumbed, muchly worn—and it was not a translation.

"My God!" said Gilbert Lang to himself, suddenly feeling abashed that out of his boarding-school books and some years familiarity in college with Greek he had fashioned a motto—putting it on the face of his brother's signet-ring—that would ever be a reminder of his quest, when here was an outcast of the South Seas who perused the first of historians for pleasure.

The selection of books was not large, but it contained some on higher mathematics, one or two on astronomy, several in Latin and a few others in Greek and numerous volumes of a medical character.

"Vengeance is mine!" Gilbert Lang had had the jeweler declare in raised characters, and, young as he was, he had meant it. Perhaps, had he been older, he would have thought more of life and that years were too precious to be wasted in threading the labyrinthine islands of the storm-ridden South Seas for one whom he had never seen but pictured as a fiend incarnate.

He hurriedly glanced about at the charts and instruments as he left the cabin; then he stumbled into the cuddy where he found his own grips and trunk. Little room was left after those things were in, but it was enough, and he sat on his bunk to think.

AT THE fountain-head of every event there is a coincidence, sometimes so commonplace as scarcely to be recognized; sometimes incredibly startling. And Gilbert Lang vaguely perceived that nothing he could have said or done would have linked him to Williams so much as that ring. There in the South Seas of massacres, blackbirding, trading and outlawry he had called to Williams for help in a cryptic tongue that not one man in ten thousand would have understood.

Gilbert Lang did not know it then, but it was not in those days so very unusual for a strong white man to have a number of natives from some island or other attached to him and follow his fortunes wherever he went. Men, women and children recognized him as their law-giver. But usually he was related to them—had married a native wife—and it was his sons and sons-in-law and their uncles and mothers. But Williams did not have a native wife. Not only that, but he was even more aloof with the women than with the men.

"What on earth is a man like that doing here?" Gilbert Lang asked of himself, and no answer came, only guesses.

"Must have got into trouble in the States—or England."

"Trouble in the States—or England" is the panacea for all doubts as to why a man is in the South Seas.

"Such a man!" He was beginning in a way to succumb to the personality that had made the tribes of natives Williams' followers.

Gilbert Lang reviewed what he had seen and learned of Williams. Always he was tense, seemingly on the point of exploding, but Gilbert had never seen him lose his temper. The natives came to him like children with their quarrels and usually left laughing. In three weeks, when one hears nothing else, one begins to pick up words, but as yet he could not often understand what Williams said, but, from the manner of speaking and the attitude of those who heard, he judged that Williams used mostly sarcasm.

Williams himself seemed tireless. He was quick as a fish, and there is nothing quicker or stronger under heaven. Give to fish the claws and teeth of the felines, and lions and tigers would be to a shark much as a mouse to a cat. Williams undoubtedly had the physical strength of two men, but, more than that, he had brains, the mental driving-power. Williams was a wonderful man. And those books!

Gilbert Lang had been born among those who, having a long heritage of wealth and social position, had attained the instinct of culture. The lore that is worthless to money-makers had found appreciation in his family, which had had wealth for so long that a genealogist was needed to reveal its source. Gilbert Lang was not a snob. He had simply been born in an atmosphere differing from the birth condition of others,

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and he was as much out of place knocking about among the men of the islands as a bird under water. But he felt a sort of caste kinship toward Williams—after he had seen those books. A caste kinship, but not equality.

So Gilbert Lang sat brooding and thinking, and the *Mary* ran out to the long seas, and they caught her broadside, and she heaved and rocked. The boy was a poor sailor, and he knew it. He tumbled into his bunk and lay there.

A few hours later Williams came in, and in ten minutes Gilbert Lang was hating him.

"Up you go and out on deck. Lie in your bunk and you'll be sick the rest of your life. Get up and haul on the lines. Work."

Gilbert Lang protested that he was too sick, and the next thing he knew he had been jerked out of his bunk, stood on his feet, shoved through the door and was being hustled up the ladder.

He was dizzy and sick. He remembered all he had heard of Williams and believed it. He believed more than that. The man was a frightful bully. Gilbert Lang hated the ship and the grinning, chattering, cooking natives. Ugh! They were cooking some horrible mess in the stone fireplaces forward, and the nauseating odors swept upon him in the forecastle. His stomach rebelled.

A soft brown hand touched his shoulder, and Uala murmured sweetly—

"Gentleman much bad?"

For many days Gilbert Lang had wondered how so beautiful a girl as Uala could be a native. But now he could only smell the oil with which she lavishly greased her beautiful body.

All that day he was deathly sick. He seriously thought of jumping overboard. That brought the thought that a half dozen dark bodies would flash over after him almost before he had struck water.

He saw everybody eating, eating, poking the food down with their fingers and shrieking between mouthfuls. He prayed for something to happen; that the ship would strike a reef—anything to stop her.

But Williams kept after him. Something was to be done every minute. How Gilbert Lang hated that man!

That night he slept as tired men sleep, and he awoke the next morning with a strange sensation in his stomach. He sat up and wondered about it. He was not dizzy. The sickness was gone; it might come back if he got up. But he ventured up and out. It was early. Most of the natives were dozing about the deck. The wind, crisp and cool, caused him to swell his chest. He went forward, and there came to his nose the odor of broiled fish. Banoo was cooking his breakfast. And Gilbert Lang never was so hungry before in his life. That was the strange sensation in his stomach.

"Him big fella," said Banoo. "Have bite?"

"Thank you," said Gilbert Lang, and he squatted beside Banoo, who tended the fish, turning it adroitly, banking down little flames that threatened to burn instead of cook, and all the while chattered, dwelling on the beauties of broiled fish as against those baked, explaining cheerfully that everybody else on board was a fool because they scorned the broiled.

And, when the fish was done, Gilbert Lang sat with Banoo and picked the bones.

When he had finished, he and Banoo were like blood-brothers, and Gilbert Lang laughed at the bantering and playful scolding of the happy throng that came crowding around the fireplaces.

Then he went aft and, climbing the poop ladder, walked straight up to Williams, who was just finishing with the log, and apologized.

"Mr. Williams, I want to thank you for kicking me out of that bunk yesterday. I was sick all the way from San Francisco to Honolulu. I was sick all the way down. And I would not get out of my bed. I did not understand yesterday."

Williams very nearly smiled as he said briefly:

"All right. You may get a touch of it every time you leave a harbor, but it won't last long—if you don't turn in."

DAY after day the *Mary* put her sharp nose into the waves and bore east and south. Sometimes Williams would heave to for hours or a day, lower a whale-boat and take soundings. Again the *Mary* would put into some harbor for trade or water. At last she came into the Solomons, and at one of the villages Williams learned a German man-o'-war was in the vicinity. After that Williams went to the masthead every dawn with a telescope and searched the horizon.

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No one knew where he was making for or why. No one seemed to care. The *Mary*, after being in the midst of islands, suddenly seemed to lose them. It was the German man-o'-war that she was losing by going far north. After Malaita is passed, practically all of the good harbors where a warship is likely to lurk are on the south of the islands. Williams, apparently having all the time in the world, caught sight of the tall range on Bougainville, rounded Buka and dropped anchor in Queen Carola Harbor to inquire after the German.

She had passed that way some weeks before. Williams did not remain long, for there is no fresh water, but pushed across to Bougainville and came down along the coast for twenty miles, where there are innumerable small bays and reefs and sheltered water of all depths.

Williams seemed to be known in the village of Gopassa that rested on the little bay, its two arms extending three-quarters of a mile out as if to welcome wayfarers and each arm covered with palms and bush so that a craft within them can not be seen unless come upon through the entrance. He went ashore alone, much to the alarm of his crew. He came back with Chief Ghorki and a canoe full of warriors, and ceremonious introductions took place on board the *Mary*.

The islanders were noble-looking men except for their faces—scarred by tattooing. They were darker than the Samoans and Tongans, and their hair was kinky but not short like an African's. The Samoans, like all of the Polynesians, have long hair. There is an ethnological difference between them: the Solomons are the more surly, perhaps the better warriors by virtue—if it be a virtue—of incessant warfare, not only between coastal tribes and those of near-by islands but with the bushmen of the interior.

Little was known then, no more now, of those bushmen. Even the coast then had not been anywhere near surveyed; the work is not yet finished. Not until the blackbirders visited them did the natives encounter white men other than an occasional whaler and perhaps once a half-century some explorer or scientific expedition. The tribes on the coast were literally between the inland devils and the deep blue sea, and, like most—if not all—natives, they were ridden by sorcerers, cheated and mistreated by whites and racked by "civilized" diseases wherever the white man set foot.

Yet, like most of the coast tribes, the Gopassa people spoke the bastard English of the traders and could swear.

Williams made presents to the chief and all of his men: fish-hooks and knives mostly but beads and strips of red cloth, too, as well as tobacco and pipes.

They were big lithe men, flat-featured, with droop ear-lobes, some weighted with stones until the lobe was stretched until it seemed long enough to circle the head. Pieces of bone were thrust through the septum. Bracelets and armlets of shells and boars' tusks were in profusion, and they wore a kind of girdle of bark. Their arms were clubs, spears—poisoned—bows and arrows—poisoned—which they had left in their canoe, and also the tomahawks of clam shell.

Williams explained what he wanted. It was not men to go away with him. No. He would give men and women work and pay if they wished, but they would scarcely leave the village. No. He did not want copra. It rains so much in the Solomons that copra has to be dried over fires, and the smoke injures its quality. It was not ivory nuts. No. He wanted shells out of the sea, oyster shells, heaps and heaps of them. The Gopassa people could dive and bring them up. His own people would dive, too.

They would spread them on the beach, and for a heap that covered as much ground as a man could cross in twenty steps five pieces of tobacco would be given, together with one fish-hook. For forty steps one might have ten pieces of tobacco and a knife. And so on. For the little white stones inside of the oyster there would be also tobacco. But that part was not emphasized lest the natives do nothing but search for pearls, and it was shells that Williams wanted. Shells were bringing between seven hundred and one thousand dollars a ton, and the pearls—well, they would be welcome.

Oysters, like gold, are where you find them. Williams had found them among the Gopassa reefs some two years before and had bided his time for coming back with a ship-load of Samoans to haul them out. The oyster-beds were not extensive but virgin; the shells large and lustrous, some of the finest he had ever seen.

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Chief Ghorki would think it over, which meant that he would go to his leading devil-devil man—the sorcerer, the ecclesiastic behind the temporal power—and get his advice.

The party was scarcely gone when Williams, calling to one of the fishing canoes in which the Gopassa folk swarmed about the *Mary*, brought one of the boys on board, gave him presents and then presented him with a package for the devil-devil, and the boy was warned that, if the package were not delivered, the devil-devil man would surely know of it and all manner of dire things would follow.

The package contained tobacco, a small bottle of gin, a rag doll, two large fish-hooks and a child's brightly-illustrated picture-book.

The next day Chief Ghorki came back and said it would be a great honor to have the pleasure of catching oysters.

So Williams took his natives on shore, and there was feasting and dancing from morning until night—though it rained and rained.

And Gilbert Lang was given a hut to himself, but he mingled with the natives, picking up their words, learning their customs, being surprized to find that they had a social system as rigorous as that into which he was born. But most of all he was amazed to find that they were very human—not to be confounded with humane.

The days, even the rainy ones, were tolerable. There was always something doing. Williams was busy engaging and explaining to natives and building platforms on double canoes on to which the oysters could be piled until taken to the beach.

But the nights, the long lonesome nights, oppressed Gilbert Lang. Homesickness and the hunger for vengeance came upon him like two vultures. He felt his time wasted in that savage village; he should be up and moving. Some day he would find whom he sought. He knew it. He felt it with the intense conviction of one who believes that God is just. Some day, somewhere, he would meet her, and then . . . .

Whenever he thought of that time to come, his jaws contracted as when a man summons up his last ounce of strength—and his fingers would grow stiff and claw-like as if about to close mercilessly around a slender neck. But, then, Gilbert Lang was very young.

II

GILBERT LANG leaned against the doorway and smoked a pipe as he looked at the unending threads of rain. The tobacco was strong, and the pipe was before breakfast. Three months ago it would have made him deathly sick. He stood with his hands in his pockets and moodily watched the empty street, empty except for the chickens and pigs and dogs that wandered about. Again he was thinking, wondering, hoping and dreading.

Presently he heard Marua, the aged woman who had made herself into his cook and housekeeper, moving about in the shack behind his hut. She was raking out the coals and throwing coconut shells on to them. Thriftily she had heaped her fuel at a corner of the shack where it would be handy and dry. Soon she would come with tea and biscuits, smile toothlessly and inquire as to his health and complain of her own.

As he stood there, he heard faintly the playful shouting of voices far out in the bush. It was the sentries whom Williams stationed out every night on the trails leading to the village. They were coming in to say how sleepy and hungry they were. Probably they had slept as well as anybody in the village beneath their lean-tos and mats across the trails, but at least they had been in the way of raiding bushmen and, even if caught napping, their hubbub and shots would have alarmed the village. However, it is about as easy to catch a native asleep as a mongoose, unless he has gorged himself into a stupor.

Chief Ghorki was surprized that the Samoans and Tongans would venture, and remain, so far from the village. Baraka, the devil-devil man, assured Williams that ghosts and demons would certainly make off with them unless his own—Baraka's—charms should be strong enough to protect them.

Baraka was an excellent politician. If nothing happened to the sentries, then he could call upon the world to bear witness that his charms had kept away the demons which everybody knew were in the woods and which many had seen and some had fought. It was always a mark of heroism to have fought off a demon. And, if anything did happen, if one of the sentries should disappear, Baraka might plausibly

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invite all to bear witness that he had told them so!

But that night nothing had happened. The guards had not had their sleep disturbed.

The mumbling of voices, the sounds of morning activity, began to be heard, and the noise grew. A naked baby unsteadily clambered out of a doorway and gave chase to a chicken. It splashed about in the wet and mud and rain cheerfully as a coddled baby in its enameled tub—until it fell, flat and sprawling. Then it yelled lustily, squalling at the top of its voice. Hands were poked out; faces grinned in amusement, and an elder sister leaped from a doorway, caught up the tot by an arm and carried it, still wailing, back into the house to be solaced with a segment of sugar-cane.

Williams, naked but for the short trousers, with a long knife in a sheath at his belt, came down the center of the street. Greetings from doorways were called at him by the Gopassa folk, and he answered as he walked on—answered with a word but scarcely looked to right or left.

Gilbert Lang again wondered what was the hold that this man had on natives when he treated them so indifferently. True, he did not in any way abuse them. True, he gave them medicine—if they would take it. True, he was generous. But, try as the Gopassa people sometimes did, they could not impose on him, and he had promptly knocked one man down who made a significant noise with his lips and a gesture of contempt at him. Most strangely, the man did not seem to mind.

"Good morning," said Gilbert. "Is there anything I can do today to help."

"No," said Williams, but instead of going on as usual, he stopped, and, though he looked hard at the boy, he seemed to be thinking of something else. Then he said—and Gilbert Lang remembered and marked every word, for it was the first time Williams had ever in the least explained or talked with him of the affairs at hand—"This rain will play —— with melting out the oysters. I knew it, but I knew something else, too. Two years ago, when I was here, I hauled a trader off the rocks. He was with me when I sighted the oyster-beds.

"Six months ago I picked up word that this fellow was fitting out a lugger for pearl-fishing. He had got in with Willerby. Winston Willerby. Never heard of him? No. Of course not. Willerby's the king of the South Seas—or he wants to be. I'll tell you about him some time. Curious tale. I have been meaning to tell you, Lang, that, when I get the time, we will act more like friends. I like you. I said to myself last night, 'That boy must not feel that I don't know or care whether he is on earth. 'Get —— lonesome, don't you?"

"Sometimes, very, Mr. Williams."

"I know. I've been through it. Willerby entertains all captains of war-ships, commissioners, governors and inspectors. He may come up this way. He may. But ——"

Williams broke off abruptly and walked on.

Had he finished the sentence, he would have said, "But, for the first time in all the pearling that I have ever heard of, these oysters are full of pearls. Real ones. Big ones. Baroques and true ones. It is tremendous. It is a golconda. And I am going to stick and work it out."

But he did not finish, and Gilbert Lang did not know of the unusual treasure. For one thing, he could not bear to go near the decaying oysters. The odor was terrific. "Terrific" is the word. Nothing so racks the nostrils as decaying fish, nothing except oysters, and they are worse.

However, Gilbert Lang did not at all reflect on what Williams could have left unsaid. He was surprized, delighted, that this man of bronze had at last unbent.

After Williams came straggling the workers, men and women and children, of his party. The Gopassa folk would stir out later. Almost every one went out to the oyster-beds, and some worked. They shouted greetings to Lang, and he answered cheerfully. They pelted one another with pebbles, raced, scrambled, played, as they moved to work in the rain. There was no reason why rain should deter them when they would spend most of the day in the water, filling network baskets with shells torn loose from the coral beds.

Marua came to the door with her tea and biscuits, smiled broadly and maundered her inquiries as to Gilbert's health.

MARUA was aged but active. Her hair was thin and grayed. On her withered body were the shriveled outlines of tattooing. She was naked except for a girdle of leaves, though Marua

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had once worn the calico and muslin wrappers of the missionaries. She had known whalers, missionaries, beach-combers and traders, sailors from men-of-war—all the men that came below the line. Marua liked to talk, to talk of other days when she was a girl of great beauty and everybody was happy.

But Gilbert had never encouraged her speech. She was, until he became accustomed to her toothless mumbling, hard to understand. He would rather have had Uala waiting on him. He would not have listened indifferently to the words that flowed quaintly, melodiously from her beautiful lips. But Uala was a coquette and a tease. He might not understand Marua's words, but he could not understand Uala's flirtations. She was incomprehensible.

At times she avariciously begged of him everything he owned and most that he wore—even the buttons. But she was always bringing him such treasures as came into her fair hands: pretty wreaths or a mess of flying-fish—anything. And he often saw his gifts to her in other's hands, and she would shamelessly admit parting with them. But Marua asked nothing and gave her services. Sometimes Gilbert's heart smote him because he did not like Marua better and Uala less.

"Wet, wet, wet, all time wet," said Marua, placing the steaming bowl of tea on the table. "My home is sun and warm. No pains here and here—" and expressively she touched her back and legs, where rheumatism had laid its viperous fangs. "Misser Williams say, 'Come,' and we come. He say, 'Come to hell,' we come. Near hell here."

"Why, Marua?"

"Why what?"

"Why would you go any place with Mr. Williams?"

Marua looked at him for a moment in open-mouthed astonishment. It was as if some one had asked why did she eat or sleep or do anything of the things that were natural.

Then Marua turned loose her tongue. Why indeed do everything that Williams wanted! Was he not a friend? Was there man, woman or child who had ever known him who did not have trade goods and food? Had he not driven off rascals that would cheat natives? Had he not killed them—with his own hands? He had. Had he not told the natives to throw away the gowns and trousers that missionaries put on them? Had he not told the natives that missionaries were liars when they said that God was angered by dances and feasts?

He had. Had he not said that white men would bring disease and sickness and to keep away from them? Had he not told the missionaries that they were fools and liars? He had. Did he ever promise and not do? Never!

And Marua repeated and repeated herself, growing more and more excited, until she fairly shrieked.

But Gilbert Lang listened intently. He was amazed, rather shocked, too. He would not have called himself religious, but Williams seemed blasphemous. Missionaries came out to save the souls of heathens, and Williams called them fools and liars!

The man could not mean it, could not believe it. Perhaps he took that sacrilegious means of ingratiating himself into the favor of the natives.

Gilbert Lang did not really think that. He only thought of it with the fear that it might be true. And, long after even the tireless-tongued Marua had finished, he sat wondering just what could be the real reason for Williams doing his best to keep the natives in a state of savagery?

He was at length interrupted by a little crowd of wild-eyed, dark-hued urchins, who crowded curiously and for a moment silently outside of his door. Presently he was being urged by Gopassa children to come out with his gun and go hunting, and—though the effort to make each other clearly understood was a little labored—he was promised the sight of a lizard, big as a man, that was somewhere around, because chickens had been disappearing, and the tracks were found. And, as their astute eyes perceived that he was not enthusiastic over chasing an elusive lizard, he was promised eggs by digging in the beach; or there were birds to shoot—or flying-foxes.

He would have much preferred to be let alone, but the youngsters were insistent and showed symptoms of growing obstreperous. Like spoiled children the world over, if a tentative venture at politeness would not get what they wanted, they would try rage. They wanted Gilbert Lang—not himself alone, but Gilbert Lang with his gun. That most wonderful magic stick that

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talked like thunder and killed all the same as a ghost-shooter. Rifles were not wholly unknown in the village, but none were owned just then by Gopassa folk, and the children had never before had an opportunity to examine one closely or stand by while it roared at its victim.

So Gilbert Lang went hunting, and after him trooped the children of the village, and a score of things, birds mostly, were pointed out to his unseeing eyes—or he saw them only after they had taken wing. The children, with native frankness, were very plain in their opinion of his eyesight, and they were continually anxious for him to shoot, though, if he raised the gun as if to fire, they one and all stood in an ecstasy of terror, listening for the gun's roar.

They went farther and farther into the bush over well-traveled trails, for coconut groves and taro patches lay in that direction, and villagers sometimes have their gardens a mile or more away. To visit them in the daytime is one thing. To visit them at night is another, though the dangers from the "demons" that prowl through the night might perhaps be less than those of the bushmen head-hunters who lurk about to cut trophies from the shoulders of stray villagers.

Now it happens that it is considered less a mark of prowess to take the head of a man than of a woman, but the greatest trophy of all to a Bougainville bushman is the head of a child. That is more logical than it may at first appear and in theory is far more heroic than in practise. Men wander about the bush, often alone. To waylay one is but the work of an indifferent warrior. Women, as a usual thing, remain closer to the village or, when abroad, have companions, and he who takes a woman's head is supposed to have run some risks.

But children are continually under the feet of their elders. To have the head of a child hanging from one's roof-tree, or the rafters above one's allotted place in the *gammal*—or *tambu*—house, implies that the warrior had invaded the village with great cunning or with extreme valor hacked his way through a cordon of guards.

Gilbert Lang had a troop of seven or eight children at his heels, and they were like ill-trained puppy pointers, running hither and thither, crying their discoveries and urging him in this direction and that.

Suddenly a blood-curdling shriek, as of a child being murdered, rose above the playful clamor of voices, and in one glance Gilbert Lang saw a club fall on the head of a little child some twenty yards before him and saw also three bushmen break cover and leap forward. The thin, high voices of the children shrieked their panic. The bushmen raiders howled exultation.

Gilbert Lang was not a rifleman. He had never stood face to face with danger before, and fright very nearly paralyzed him. Now some men when frightened throw away whatever is in their hands and run; others yell senselessly, being wholly unaware, or even afterward unable to remember, what they are about, and still others stand immobile, silent, and wait. These last are dangerous.

Gilbert Lang did not, could not, move a muscle until a bounding bushman swung a club above his head; then he fired point-blank, and the bushman crumpled as if from a thunderbolt.

The children had scampered into the brush and with the instinct of wild things sought hiding-places which would have baffled the eyes of the average white man, but they were pursued by elder wild things, more versed in bush lore than the canniest of coast dwellers. And the raiders sought their precious trophies rather than the head of the man, though a white man's head is regarded among them much as a black pearl among savage white ladies who adorn themselves with gems rather than shells—and the plumage of slain birds rather than with human bones thrust through the septum.

GILBERT LANG could hear the children screaming, could hear the cracking and flounce of bodies in the bush, could catch glimpses of the hunted and hunters, though he stood alone in the trail and was for the time safe. But he was no longer frightened. The thing that is called courage—and comes from no man knows where, though one's ancestors are usually credited with the gift—came to him, but it was a courage mingled with unutterable wrath at the slaughter of children by men.

The brutality of it smote his civilized nerves. Scarcely knowing what he was doing, but knowing well what he wanted to do, he sprang into the bush, tore his way through—leaving clothing and skin and

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blood on the thorns—and shot another man who had gleefully just raised the severed and dripping head of a child.

Two others remained. But Gilbert Lang had not counted numbers. He did not know that four was a large head-hunting party. The madness that comes on gallant men was on him. He had no thought of anything but to get within killing distance of another savage.

Off to the right of him the bush was in a tumult. It was too dense to see. But he could hear. A crazed child was shrieking. Abruptly the shrieking stopped—a scream ended half-uttered.

Gilbert Lang went forward with a rush. Vines, briers, bushes densely crossed his way. But he fought over and through, bleeding afresh at every step. He felt no pain. He tore and scratched himself from brow to ankles, and he made much noise. When he had wrenched his way through, he found only the headless body and the wide blood pool.

He stood for a moment breathless. The work of coming through the bush had been fast and hard. But he had expected to find and kill a bushman. It was more than may be conveyed by the mere word "disappointment." It was righteous rage thwarted.

In that second that he gasped for breath and gazed in the fascination of horror at the poor little dark body, from which feebly spurted the last heart's blood, he became aware of cries and calls in the distance. The Gopassa people were coming to avenge the slain.

Then something hit him. Feebly he tried to fight back in the direction where he had caught a glimpse of a hideous black face. But consciousness slipped away, and he fell across the body of the child.

The Gopassas had swarmed together noisily. Had they been making a raid on a village, they would have moved with stealth, but, alarmed and angry, they cried out and thoughtlessly gave warning.

But the Samoans, who had guarded the trails through the night and who had been relieved of work during the day but who, having slept through the night while on guard, had therefore not been so drowsy as they pretended to the villagers, were men of more judgment as well as of quicker perception. As the first screams of the children broke faintly on their ears, followed by continual screaming, they had snatched their rifles and quietly ran down the trail. And, as they had been drilled and drilled and drilled in gunnery by the relentless Williams, they were fair shots; so, when Gilbert Lang opened his eyes, his aching head was on the knee of a Samoan. The bushman, riddled, lay on the ground.

The fourth bushman had got away. Back into the almost impenetrable hills he went bearing two dripping trophies that would make old men cackle admiration at such an unheard of feat, and the women of the village, from the dim circle on the outside of the men who squatted around the hero, would listen thrilled to his own account of the valorous exploit, and for days and weeks and months they would call other men who came a-wooing cravens and laggards.

Gilbert Lang was now aware of his pains, but more than that he was filled with the sickening sensation that comes to most men, to every sensitive man, when he has first killed. It is not enough that one may know he was justified in the eyes of God, of other men and his own conscience. And it meant something of a relief, but not much, to remember that these bushmen were savages, beasts. He shut his eyes and was silent, and the Samoans thought him more injured than he was. He let them think so, else they would want to talk.

Whoever has been scratched by wait-a-bits, the vine with innumerable fish-hook-like thorns, jabbed by sharp twigs, skinned for inches by pushing between lianas and finally dropped by a blow from a war-club may have some excuse for silence other than the wish to keep from answering questions.

The Gopassas came rushing up, boasting of what they would have done had they met the bushmen, angry at the raiders, vowing revenge but—so it seemed to Gilbert Lang—heartlessly indifferent to the murder of the children. He did not know that, though the Gopassas—and all Solomons—are in a way affectionate parents, yet the children are regarded with much the same detachment as pigs. Infants are often put to death.

A teething baby is sometimes strangled because the father can not sleep through the noise. And, strange as it may seem, Gopassa, in common with many villages, recruited its man-strength by buying little

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children of the bushmen with whom the village was more or less continually at war, and those children grew into coastal men and warred on their birthplace. There is no use trying to point out the illogic of such things. If a savage woman found child-bearing a burden, she, like her civilized sisters, found means to evade it, and, as baby-raising is a care, many families dispensed with the trouble by trading salt to the bushmen.

And the death of a child is more or less the death of a piece of property, of a slave, though slavery in its common meaning did not exist at Gopassa. That is, there were slaves, but they were not ill-treated—even when a head was needed to christen a new war-canoe, the slave would be killed without warning, consequently without anguish.

So, when he saw a Gopassa father identify the child's body at his feet and stoop with scarcely a sign of grief to examine the severed neck for the purpose of seeing how clean the blow had been, Gilbert Lang's brains reeled dizzily, and he feverishly cursed such brutes.

HE WAS half carried by the Samoans down the trail toward the village and on the way met Williams hurrying up.

"Hurt?"

"Not much," said Gilbert Lang.

"They say you killed as many bushmen as one man has fingers; so I judge you must really have hit one or two."

"Oh these beastly, horrible people! Are all islanders like this?"

"No. Not where the missions and white men are. They are worse."

And Williams and Gilbert Lang stepped to one side of the trail to make way for crowds of Gopassas who came jubilantly through the bush, each crowd bearing something—bodies, the bodies of the bushmen.

"They at least have the decency to bury them," said Gilbert Lang.

Williams looked at him sharply from the corners of his eyes.

Then came other natives carrying the bodies of the children.

"Yes," said Williams, indicating the little bodies, "they will bury these."

"But the others?"

"Will furnish a funeral feast for the dead children!"

"My God!" cried Gilbert Lang in horror. "They won't—won't do that with these men I killed!"

"Yes."

"Stop them. You must stop them! It can't be—cannibals!"

"Why not?" said Williams coldly.

"You can't mean that. It is terrible. The very vilest thing on earth—to eat a human being."

"No. In the Carolines the worst thing is to eat an eel. In India, I believe, it is a cow. In the Fijis it is——"

"You defend them?" cried the boy in terror.

"No. I am explaining. Before we get to the village, the women will be busy scalding and scraping the bodies. Then they will be laid out and cut up by Baraka; then wrapped in leaves with papaws and put in ground ovens. Tomorrow night they will hold a feast and offer you the place of honor."

Gilbert Lang turned away in nausea. His head was splitting, but he was more sick at the thought.

"Take away the meat supply of your civilized countries," said Williams bitterly, "and let them be continually at war. Let their gardens be burned, their groves ruined, and in three generations they will be eating their victims and slaves—with relish!"

The boy groaned and held up a protesting, silencing hand.

Williams glared at him. The restrained fury that seemed ever to characterize the man when he spoke found expression in his eyes.

"Your —— missionaries," he went on, "come and are horrified at cannibalism. They tell the natives it is wrong. They write back letters making themselves out as heroes to be living in the midst of man-eaters. And they wonder that they can not stop cannibalism. Why don't they bring in pork and beef and mutton? It is meat these savages want, and in many of the islands they haven't even a ritual for the feast.

"An Englishman eats beef because he thinks it will make him strong like an ox. The sorcerer tells these fellows that, if they eat the bodies of slain warriors, the warriors' strength will go into them. I would not stir my little finger to keep these Gopassas from eating those bushmen."

Gilbert Lang looked at him. The boy

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was stunned, horrified, terrified. The man seemed a savage himself. Such words as he had uttered were terrible.

"Come on," said Williams, taking hold of his arm. "You have to get patched up and to bed. Fever is about ready to climb you. You haven't been taking the quinin I gave you, either."

Gilbert Lang jerked away.

"Leave me alone," he said in disgust and horror.

Williams stepped back, looked at the boy from head to foot, then wheeled, spoke rapidly to the Samoans and went off down the trail.

Within an hour Gilbert Lang was out of his head. Intermittently he was delirious for days, and during those days he was lashed most of the time in a hammock in Williams' house. And Williams, feeling the pulse and hot forehead from time to time, ransacked the medicine-chest, which—unlike most of the chests seen in that part of the world—was not one wherein the bottles were numbered to correspond with the disease—as, for instance: Diabetes, No. 3.

Gilbert Lang knew nothing of the feast around which the village howled and at which the women were content with those portions discarded by the men. In some villages it was forbidden that women should ever taste of human flesh—possibly so that the warriors would be the more likely to eat their fill. Gilbert Lang knew nothing of the honor that had come to his name, for the children that fled before the bushmen had spread the report that the bush had been alive with enemies, and the Gopassa folk believed or wanted to believe and pretended to do so.

He knew nothing of the praise given him for having provided a feast—though the praise was not couched in those words. He knew nothing of the long hours that Williams stood moodily plucking at his short beard and watching, also listening, for the boy talked, mentioned names, spoke of events and cried secret things from the bottom of his heart. Nor did Gilbert Lang know of the unending procession of Samoans, Tongans, Gopassas that came by the door to peep at him and wonder; nor did he know that Uala the beautiful, following the instincts of the savage, carried her most precious possession—a long knife, richly ornamented at the handle, which she bore on a lanyard tied to her wrist when driving—to Baraka as the price she would pay if he would exorcise the demon that had taken possession of the boy.

Baraka had never seen such a knife, and for it he promised to do his best, and he rubbed ointments on himself, smeared his face with colors and cavorted wildly before the wooden god at the rear of the *gammal*, or club-house, of the men.

And Gilbert Lang grew better.

The sweet cool milk of the young coconut was his hourly drink, and in an iron kettle Marua, under the scrutinizing eyes of Williams, made a broth of pigeons that Williams himself had paid the men to shoot with knob-headed arrows.

Williams, not having two hammocks, slept on the mats laid on the dirt floor of his house, just as the natives. For no other reason so much as that, the natives, especially when they begin to grow old, are filled with aches and pains. But Williams did not sleep much. It was one of the things he never seemed to need. Most white men grow lazy as a native under tropic skies—if the rain-sodden sky of Bougainville could be called "tropic"—but he seemed consumed, or rather driven, by a raging inner fire. Always he was tense, quick, but without being restless.

SHE HAD much more to think of than Gilbert Lang. Something more than a hundred souls were in his keeping. He had brought the Samoans and Tongans far from their homes. And trouble was coming. A visiting canoe from a distant village brought word that had been brought to it from a village that had had word brought to it, and so on. Such a relay might well have been thought to be unreliable, but Williams knew otherwise. He knew to whom the ship *Bebe* belonged. The natives knew the name; they could make no mistake on that, for throughout the Solomons it was the word for butterfly. It is rare—perhaps in no other instance discoverable—to find the same word used amid all those islands.

The *Bebe* belonged to Willerby. Willerby and his friends traveled on her and lived like those who once dined, breakfasted and lunched out of the flesh-pots of Egypt. But the *Bebe* did not travel alone. She had

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two boats with her, which Williams recognized as luggers. Even a relay of native mouths will not garble a lugger beyond identification.

The *Bebe* and her convoy were looking for something. The natives did not know what. But they sailed up the coast, stopping at every village, searching amid the reefs. The natives wondered why. Williams knew. They were searching for the oyster-beds from which two years before such fine shell had been taken. And fine shell was bringing close to one thousand dollars a ton, with pearls possibly amounting to a king's ransom.

Willerby was coming, and Willerby would make trouble. It was Willerby's way. In that way he had driven out independent traders and fishers and established himself in the Solomons and nearby groups, in the New Hebrides, Banks and Santa Cruz, even in the Louisiades. Willerby could call upon the war-ships of two nations to protect him, because no captain came into those waters without him and his crew being entertained in Willerby's fashion.

Willerby sometimes made the mistake of trying to entertain a decent, God-fearing captain. But the South Seas are far from home, and most men shed their morals with their coats as they drop down past the equator.

Willerby would make trouble, and he knew how.

Williams was undecided whether to stand and take part in the trouble or whether to run. There was known to be a German war-ship somewhere in the Solomon waters. Most likely Willerby knew exactly where. Possibly there was a Britisher somewhere around, too. If so, Willerby no doubt was well acquainted with her captain.

Williams thought long and deeply and said nothing to any one. When Gilbert Lang grew better, Williams gave him less attention but kept him still in his own house. The boy remembered very well the last conversation they had had together, and memory of it still was revolting to him—so revolting that he did not speak of it or refer to it. As if by some psychic understanding both he and Williams let it lie with unmentionable things. Gilbert Lang saw less and less of Williams as the days went by and wondered at his long, tense silences when they were together.

Then one day Williams took the canoe in which he had for some days been scouting about along the rock-ribbed, cliff-towering shore, honeycombed and eaten out with bays, small passages and every conceivable picturesque and dangerous formation, and disappeared with Banoo and a crew of Gapossa paddlers. Forty-eight hours later he came back, went on board the *Mary* and did much of the work himself in getting out certain boxes that were handled with extreme care. For one thing they were marked "Dynamite." Then again he disappeared, carrying the boxes with him. Forty-eight or so hours later he returned.

It was the first time that Gilbert Lang had ever seen Williams anything even remotely akin to cheerfulness.

He came into the house with a pleasant greeting, quickly felt of the boy's pulse, pronounced him fair and fine, then suddenly laughed. There was much that was strange in the laugh, but it was not without merriment.

Gilbert Lang looked the surprize that he felt.

"Willerby's coming," said Williams and stopped.

The boy showed inquiry by his expectant eyes.

"The German, too—before we are through!"

"After you?" asked Gilbert.

"Me? No. After shell. They don't know I am here. And then——"

Williams broke off in his strange laugh and would say no more.

III

GOPASSA was a fair-sized village. It mustered around two hundred fighting men, men who used clubs, spears, bows and tomahawks. The spear and club were the chosen weapons, as none of the islanders seemed to have recognized the possibilities of the arrow. They used them, but the arrows were never tipped with feathers to make the flight true. The points were of bone, of slender bone splinters and poisoned—or supposed to be.

The Solomon Islander is a peculiar creature. He has developed psychotherapy to an amazing degree—but often it is psycho-something else than therapy. The reverse, whatever that may be. The devil-devil men, the sorcerers, sometimes make

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ghost-shooters to rid a client of a disagreeable person. The ghost-shooter is often merely a hollow stem, like a segment of slender bamboo, into which the sorcerer has put human ashes, a bit of bone and "magic." The client carries this with his thumb over the open end or muzzle until in the presence of the disagreeable person; then, pointing it, he uncorks his thumb.

The disagreeable person, if he sees what has happened, at once gets sick, goes to his mat and within a few days accommodatingly dies. He always dies—unless, as less frequently happens than one might expect, he can find a devil-devil man to counteract the witchcraft. And much the same thing happens with the poisoned arrows. If the wounded man thinks they have been poisoned, he is as bad as dead. Often his death is accompanied with the symptoms of poisoning, for sometimes the arrows are poisoned.

The arrows were taken to the sorcerer, and Baraka was the chief sorcerer of the village, and he charmed them so that they would go straight and kill; also, he gave a little dab of poison with which they were to be smeared and then kept covered in a sheath. All of the weapons, to be really effective, needed to be charmed by the sorcerers, and a spear was never perfect until the thigh-bone of the first man it struck down was fitted to the handle—and Baraka had said his magic words over it, and been well paid for the service.

So it may be fairly well understood that the power behind Chief Ghorki's throne was Baraka. The chief was a warrior, but, like all of his people, from nursing days he had been raised in awe of the witch-men's terrible power. And, though Baraka claimed to be able to make the sun shine and clouds vanish and was often sought and as often promised to send the rains away, yet there were no skeptics. So adroitly could he bluff and stall and hedge, explain his failures—or rather refuse to admit them—and emphasize his successes, that men, women and children had not the least doubt as to his supernatural qualities.

Baraka was a very old man, withered and spry; his hair was gray and scraggly; his eyes sharp, and his mouth often seemed about to break into a laugh of amusement. It is a moot question as to how much faith the devil-devil men have in themselves—such men as every tribe has. The Dukduks of New Britain are conscious charlatans; the fire-walkers of Tahiti are—or were, for they have disappeared—familiar with a volcanic stone which is practically a nonconductor of heat, and all of the devil-devil men, or most of them, anyway, have certain cunning tricks that any one familiar with stage magicians would credit, though they might not explain, to sleight-of-hand.

It was evening when Williams came into the hut of Baraka. It was dark within the hut except for a glowing heap of coals from which the smoke found no outlet other than the low eaves and the open door. On the fire Baraka's elderly servant and assistant cooked their food. Skulls and bones, gourds in which were stored the ingredients of magic, scraps of oddities, painted, carved figures and charms—Baraka had, or could make, a charm for anything—hung from the rafters. It was, no doubt intentionally and with careful designing, such a place as to give a superstitious person the shivers.

Baraka was alone and squatted on his mat.

Outside it was raining.

Baraka was not in the best of humors, but he greeted Williams with hospitality, keenly aware perhaps of possible favors. Yet natives are instinctively generous and cordial toward white men—until they painfully learn that it is a wise precautionary move to be hostile. The Gopassas were not without their painful lessons in ways of white men, particularly blackbirders. But Williams was different. They had met him before, though they had not become very well acquainted.

Williams carried a package under his arm, and from the package he drew a half-pint bottle of gin. A native usually drinks the contents of a bottle, no matter what its size—or tries to. A half-pint of gin is a good deal for a stomach unaccustomed to gin, but this had been well watered.

Baraka beamed, accepted and drank in silence.

The wind shook the hut; the rain swept down, hard-blown.

"I make charms for sun. It rains. I make more charms. It rains," Baraka confided in an injured tone, but he hastily added that he had yet an even more powerful charm, one that could not fail, and he would soon prepare that, though it was difficult and exhausting. But he would certainly stop the rain.

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WILLIAMS was aware of all that went on in the village. He knew of Baraka's difficulty in producing sunshine for the spears, skulls, heaps of coconuts and promises to pay in fish and yams that had been given. Baraka was troubled. Williams, too, had watched the rain for some days: or, rather, he had watched the barometer, and this evening seemed the appointed time for calling on Baraka.

"Supposing," said Williams, speaking in the Gopassa tongue of which he knew a little, "that I should give you a charm which would bring a clear sky tomorrow afternoon—that I should give you this charm and say nothing?"

Baraka looked doubtful but hopeful. He was much interested.

"There will soon be white men—and women—come to Gopassa. From their hands whiky will flow like water."

Williams paused. "Whiky" is a word that natives soon learn. Perhaps the whalers, who seem to have left no remote spot on the seas untouched, first introduced the merits of whisky.

"Umumm," Baraka remarked anticipatingly.

"White men never give something for nothing. Even missionaries want you to wear shirts and trousers in return for salvation. Even I want something in return for my charm that will bring the sun. And those who are coming with the *Bebe* will want something in return for whiky."

"What?" the canny devil-devil man asked.

"My head!"

Baraka sucked a whistling breath between his teeth.

"I am very much attached to my head," said Williams in a grim jest that was not lost on Baraka. He smiled in appreciation. "They will make many promises to the Gopassa people if these will murder me and my black boys and girls."

Baraka nodded understandingly. He was often sought out by people who wanted others "ghost-shot" and murdered.

"But," Williams went on, "I have charms more powerful than whiky. As I am going to show you, I can bring the sun. Besides, I have rifles, and every bullet is charmed. Little black powders are put in the shell of each, as you put man-ashes in your ghost-shooters."

Baraka nodded more thoughtfully than ever and asked why he did not direct these charmed bullets against the white men who were coming.

"It may be that I shall, and I would regret much to see any Gopassa people get in the way of the bullets when I was shooting at the white men."

"Gopassa people not fools!" said Baraka.

"No. Not when sober. All men are fools when full of whiky."

Baraka worked his lips with smacking noise at the idea of being full of "whiky"; then he said—

"You bring sun?"

"No. You shall bring him." And from his package Williams produced a little tin musical rattle such as children play with.

It was brilliant with red, yellow and green paint, and Baraka jumped when Williams swung it around and the strange vibrant notes came from within.

Possibly Baraka did not have much faith in his own witchcraft, but he believed in the possibility of witchcraft, and, if this thing were not full of magic, what could make it "talk" like that?

"Tomorrow morning you go up and down the village street, swinging this and crying for the sun. Keep it up, and the sun will come. I promise the sun. It may take long, for he must wade through much water to get out. But he will come."

Baraka took the rattle gingerly, turned it over and over, held it close to the coals and admired its colors and shape, nervously made it talk a little and, gradually growing more confident, soon began to swing it with enjoyment.

"Sure bring him?" he asked.

"He will sure come," said Williams.

If Williams had undertaken to explain the truth or had showed the barometer, Baraka would have not understood in the least and still believed the barometer a great "charm." All things are supernatural to natives; everything is explained by demons and ghosts, and in that they are closely akin to the Christian nations, where every creaking empty house is haunted and only the more courageous will at midnight pass a lonely graveyard. And, as for charms and hoodoo, spilled salt, the new moon over the wrong shoulder, a cat bounding across the path, thirteen things and Fridays, three cigarets lighted from one match, annoy a great many civilized people who protest:

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"I am not superstitious. Not in the least. But——"

Baraka was grateful for the rattle. He told how grateful he was, but he did not, as he expected others to do, speak of paying for the "magic."

Williams diplomatically came to that point.

"And, if the sun comes," said Williams, "you will know I speak true things."

Baraka agreed. It may seem strange that an old and canny savage, born on Bougainville, could not remember that year after year the seemingly endless rains came to a brief stop, and so would have been suspicious of Williams' charm. But whoever has been under tropic skies in the rainy seasons, no matter how much meteorological knowledge he may have had in his head, must remember that it seemed the sun would never shine again. Moreover, while the rain was heavy, Williams promised the sun by the end of the next day. At that he was running a chance of being wrong.

"I can tell more true things. I can tell that, if the Gopassa people go near the men that come with the *Bebe*, there will be death in the village. Lots of death."

"We will drive them away," said Baraka.

"No. Merely keep away. Do not fight. Do not go near. And, if the Gopassa people drink whiky, there will be more death than if the bushmen came with all their tribes in the midst of night."

"No whiky. No." Baraka promised virtuously, swinging his rattle.

"Tell Chief Ghorki you have looked into the future and you see much death for Gopassa if he and his men go near the men from the *Bebe* or the men who come with him."

There is no feminine gender among the islanders except for despised things.

"I tell him. I make sun come, and I tell him," and Baraka tipped the empty gin bottle to suck down the drop or two that slowly trickled into his mouth.

Williams went out into the rain and stood for a moment listening to Baraka crooning his chant and swinging his musical child's rattle; then he splashed through the darkness and came to his own hut.

Gilbert Lang lay in the hammock reading by the light of a lantern swung above his head. He could lose himself in books as in nothing else. The supply was limited. Williams' library was mostly technical, with a few Greek and Latin texts and some chronicles of old voyages.

THE BOY looked up as Williams came in, and there was something akin to a guilty expression on his face. He fingered the book nervously Williams had never told him to help himself to the books, but that was not the reason for Gilbert's manner. He obviously wanted to say something, but Williams had paid no attention to him and kneeled busily before his ship's chest.

"Is this book true?" he asked at last in a skeptical tone.

Williams' face turned over his shoulder and looked toward the battered leather-bound volume that Gilbert raised.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

The book, labeled "Delano's Voyages," bore on the title page:

Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres; comprising three voyages round the world; together with a voyage of survey and discovery in the Pacific Ocean and Oriental Islands. By Amasa Delano. Boston. Printed by E. G. House, for the author. 1817.

"Listen," said Gilbert, "he makes the savage king, Abba Thulle of the Carolines —that's where I met you, wasn't it?—well, he makes him out more gallant than a crusader. The king is preparing to make war on some rebellious tribes and has sent word that in three days he will declare war. This Delano says:

"'Although I was a Christian and was in the habit of supposing the Christians superior to these pagans in the principles of virtue and benevolence, yet I could not refrain from remonstrating against this conduct on the part of the king. I told him that Christian nations considered it as within the acknowledged system of lawful and honorable warfare to use stratagems against enemies and to fall upon them whenever it was possible and take them by surprize.'

"Now," said Gilbert Lang, "this is what I mean." And he read on: "'He replied that war was horrid enough when pursued in the most open and magnanimous manner and that, although he thought very highly of the English, still their principles in this respect did not obtain his approbation, and he believed his own mode of warfare more politic and more just. He said that, if he

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were to destroy his enemies when they were asleep, others would have a good reason to retaliate the same base conduct upon his subjects and thus multiply evils, where regular and open warfare might be the means of a speedy peace without barbarity. Should he subdue his rebellious subjects by stratagem and surprize, they would hate both him and his measures and would never be faithful and happy, although they might fear his power and unwillingly obey his laws.'

"I don't believe it!" the boy concluded emphatically.

"No?" said Williams, turning around and squatting on his haunches like a savage.

"I don't," the boy repeated stubbornly.

"Why?" The word leaped from Williams's lips.

He said it so quickly, so forcibly, as to startle Gilbert.

"Look at these savages now. All over the South Seas. I saw those Caroline people. They didn't look to me like people that would live up to any such sentiments."

Williams laughed and said bitterly:

"You were cut out for a missionary. Amasa Delano sailed far and wide. His nautical reckonings were correct and his advice reliable. Maybe he lied when he wrote of natives. In a few days you will see what white men do to savages—as you call them. There are more savages in London, New York, Paris, Boston and Philadelphia than through the whole of the South Seas!"

Williams sprang to his feet as he said that. His eyes flashed, and his body was tense as if straining to leap.

Gilbert Lang was alarmed, almost frightened.

"There is more cruelty, inhumanity and barbarity in those cities than in the Solomons. The Carolines you saw were mixed and half-breeds, with the wastrel pure-bloods dominant. The men like Abba Thulle were killed off defending their villages from white savages! Wherever white men go, they carry degeneracy with them. The natives have flaws and faults, and some of them are dirty. But there was never a cleaner race on earth than the Samoans, for instance.

"As a virtue that may be next to godliness, but the missionaries told them they would go to hell if they didn't wear trousers and skirts. What's the result? Pneumonia and all the ills that flesh is heir to.

"There is not an island in the South Seas where the natives did not welcome the first white man, but the Spaniards that discovered these Solomons fired on the natives to try their guns, and there is not an island where some white savage has not outraged decency and hospitality offered him. They can't tell that one white man is better than another by looking into his face or at his ship, and the wise natives try to kill them all.

"What if New York were visited by a craft from the moon? Would not the people give of their best and hold feasts and ask countless questions? What if the moon-dwellers stole, cheated, spread infection and sailed away? Then next would come a craft full of long-faced nasal-toned missionaries to tell the New Yorkers that they and their ancestors were savages and their God a horrid conception and that, if they didn't wear clothes like moon-dwellers and pray to some Thingumabob worshiped by moon-dwellers, all New York would go to hell—what, I ask you, would the brave and sensible men of New York do?

"What if after these missionaries came moon-pirates, rotten beach-combers, thievish traders and murderous slavers? Would not the sensible New Yorkers say to the missionaries, 'Teach virtue to your people first'? And would not they kill every moon-dweller they could get their hands on? Answer me!"

Gilbert Lang was dazed and frightened. He had heard what Williams said, but he scarcely understood. The attitude of the man almost terrified him.

"But you are a white man!" the boy said nervously.

"Am I? Look at me. Naked and black. You are the first white man that has ever lived with me or near me since I came. No. I am not a white man. I am a 'nigger-lover'—the most detested thing south of the line. And I would join any cannibal tribe on any island in cutting off a blackbirder that had kidnaped its cargo!"

"Delano's Voyages" dropped from the boy's trembling fingers and fell to the floor.

He said weakly—

"I don't understand you—how you can think that way."

"No," said Williams contemptuously, "and you never will."

"Mr. Williams," said Gilbert Lang, his voice shaking, "I am grateful to you, and I do admire you—in many ways. But I will not be insulted!"

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And he started to climb down out of the hammock.

"Where are you going?" Williams snapped.

"I am going back to my own hut."

Williams glared at him and said—

"You lie back in that hammock and stay there!"

He said that and nothing more, but Gilbert Lang, who was far from being a coward, hesitated; then, with his dark eyes still on Williams' strained, fierce face, he lay back and was quiet.

Williams turned and began rummaging through his sea chest.

Gilbert Lang lay long and thoughtfully staring at the ridge-pole over his head. He was not impressed by what Williams had said, for he—Gilbert Lang—knew that it was not true. He was sorry that a man so admirable in many ways, evidentally so scholarly, too, had become crazed. Gilbert Lang was afraid, also. His was not the fear of a coward but akin to that which the bravest of men must feel when more or less compelled to live with one whose mind is unbalanced and who has such an obsession and is likely at any moment to become violent.

The feeling was really one of uneasiness rather than fear, for, as closely related as the two sensations are, there is a difference. Gilbert Lang was not a coward, but his body was strung with nerves unusually sensitive, and he was in strange surroundings and among strange men.

HE HAD come into the South Seas determined to seek out and punish a man and a woman—but chiefly the woman. His quest was just, and he knew it. His brother, Frank Lang, returning from a quasi-scientific trip to the South Seas and Australia, had brought home a wife and her brother. He had come by way of San Francisco, having arrived in that port a few days after Gilbert had sailed for a Summer in Europe. Gilbert knew of her only by report.

Frank had written that she was the most beautiful of fascinating women and that he would have some good pictures taken and send one so that the younger brother might judge for himself. The mother had written to Gilbert—

"She is beautiful and a little peculiar."

The father had written:

"It was, as you know, an astonishing surprize to find Frank had married. I hope he will not be unhappy."

Knowing both his father and mother as he did, knowing their reticence and reserve, he sensed that something must be wrong with Frank's wife, but he gave the matter scarcely more thought than the average youngster would amid the pleasant touring of Europe. Then out of a disconcerting silence at home burst the cable—

Frank dead. Come.

The silence from home had been because, as he moved to Switzerland from France, there had been a misunderstanding about forwarding his mail, and the cable was some weeks old when he found it. He left on the first boat and scarcely recognized his mother and father. They were two sad, broken people. But even in their grief they maintained their dignity, and, even as they discussed her and her brother, their voices might grow unsteady and tears fall from their eyes, but they were sustained both by the poise of their breeding and by an unshakable faith in the justice of God, who would not let such creatures as that woman and her brother go unpunished.

They had disliked the woman but had tried to treat her as their elder son's wife should be treated; they had intensely disliked the brother, but he was the brother-in-law of their son. The brother's name was, presumably, George Brown, and Frank called her Alice. The mother spoke of having seen a locket which Alice wore, and on it was the monogram of letters other than "A. B." But Alice had hastily explained that it belonged to a dear friend. But she never wore the locket afterward. The mother had thought little of the incident at the time. The father spoke of being unable to reconcile the dark, foreign appearance of the pair with the name "Brown."

Frank had met her on the ship coming to San Francisco, and the captain had married them. Frank was always impulsive, generous, heedless. He was said to have resembled an adventurous great-uncle who seemed a sport—a biological sport—in the family of Langs. That uncle had been impulsive, generous, heedless—but remorseless and unforgiving as an Indian. With regret the Langs remembered that he had also been an infidel. Frank had evidently

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got his wanderlust from that source.

Frank had taken sick and dismissed his sickness with a flourish of his hand and a kiss for his wife. He would be well soon. Her love would cure any one. She was very affectionate, and the brother—despite his vicious eyes and cruel mouth—was very solicitious. Frank did not get well soon. He died. The doctors thought it was the result of some strange illness contracted in the tropics.

Now it happens that, when Frank had come of age, his father, following the custom of the Langs, had settled almost all that he would have eventually inherited upon him. The eldest son was always so provided for and left free to follow his bent. The supposition being that a Lang of twenty-one was an intelligent being who would live up to the family traditions. And, in the midst of their sorrow, the parents had not presumed to interfere with the estate that fell to the widow.

The parents were amazed that so much had already been deeded to her; they were shocked and shamed and hurt that she should, even before the body of her husband was laid in the family vault, be so interested in financial affairs. Her brother attended to them for her. Everything was converted into cash. The pair of them prepared for a trip to Florida and left.

Lang Sr. became more and more suspicious and at last with extreme reluctance and great secrecy, for notoriety would have been the most distasteful thing conceivable, had engaged physicians to disinter the body. Then he knew that his elder son had been subtly murdered—poisoned.

Detectives sped upon the trail of the brother and sister. They had not gone to Florida, but to San Francisco. A gay time they had had of it there for a while, then moved on to Honolulu. From Honolulu they vanished into the South Seas.

The father's heart stopped beating when he read the operatives' report, and Mrs. Lang's mind soon failed her, smitten thus with the loss of son and husband.

Beside the grave of his father, which was also that of his brother, Gilbert Lang swore the oath that he again repeated, silently calling upon God to witness that it was irrevocable, as he stood for a moment coming from the entrance of the private asylum to which he had conveyed his mother. Father and brother in their graves; his mother entombed alive.

The asylum was nearly palatial, and every comfort and care would be hers, but nevertheless she was dead though her body continued to move. She could not recognize her own son or her friends. Gently and quietly she moved about and spoke of her husband and boys, but to his face she would deny that Gilbert was her son. She did not know him.

And so Gilbert Lang had come into the South Seas, seeking for Alice and George Brown, and he carried with him his brother's signet-ring on which had been raised the Greek characters declaring—

"Vengeance is mine!"

He was reasonable in thinking that nothing, man, earthquake nor tidal floods, could overshadow his quest. But at times, such as when he lay in the hammock staring at the ridge-pole, he felt that he had very nearly been deflected from the vengeance to which he had dedicated himself. The South Sea Islands were not, as he had vaguely imagined, a little group that one might scour in a few months. They were like the sands scattered by a wide-blowing whirlwind: numerous and distant. He had considered himself fortunate in being able to take passage with him who was called Hurricane Williams, and now this man seemed like an undertow that has caught a swimmer and carries him far to sea and away from the landmark toward which he wishes to beat his way.

Gilbert Lang felt jolted within his inmost being. Terrible things happened in those strange, dark islands—and happened casually, as a matter of course. The murdered children, the bushmen, the cannibal feast, the fever, the incomprehensible rage of Williams toward all white men—these things and the rain, the dismal bush and soggy earth, the sores of the natives, their frightful appearance, the insects, the mangy dogs—all wore on his sensitive mind, depressed him and at times not only made his quest seem hopeless but against his will stirred up the wish to escape back to civilization.

Yet, after such moods had run their course, he would remember the great bronze door of the vault where he had stood and watched his father placed beside his brother, and he would recall vividly as if a picture were before his eyes, the stone house overrun with ivy and the grilled gates through which he had driven with his

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mother to bury her alive. And at such times his teeth would set hard until his lean jaws protruded at the base of his cheeks; his mild dark eyes would take on a murderous glitter, and again he would renew the oath and, fastening the ring upon his finger, raise his hand upward that God might not fail to bear witness.

IV

GILBERT LANG sat in the shade moodily watching a white line of foam break on a patch of coral near the mouth of the bay. Above him a long fringe of coconut palms drooped seaward as if eager to dip their fronds in the cooling water. It was hot. An unclouded August afternoon in Bougainville—though it does not seasonally correspond to August in the so-called God's country—is warm enough to arouse the desire for shade. The air was moist; the ground steaming. It had stopped raining.

All morning Baraka had howled and pranced up and down the village street, swinging some kind of a mechanical toy, and proclaimed that the sun would shine ere it set. There appeared to be small chance of it when he first came out into the rain. Gilbert Lang wondered by what uncanny perception this withered old fellow had guessed right.

Anyway, he had guessed a-right, and the village chattered over the marvel. There were none to doubt. None could doubt that he had made magic that scattered the clouds. Had he not, while it rained, said the sun would come out? Had the sun not come as if answering his call? What more could be asked?

Even Gilbert Lang had been impressed. Though he did not believe in the magic at all, he could scarcely help believing that Baraka, in some sensitive way, had perceptions that bordered on to the supernatural. If Gilbert Lang had been of a quasi-scientific turn of mind, as his brother had been, he might have planned to write an article relating the facts and let white people ponder the mystery as best they could.

But he sat moodily in the shade and brooded.

The bay was empty except for the children splashing in the shallow water, except for the women that stood breast-deep angling for the evening meal, except for here and there a small outrigger about some affair of its own.

That morning Williams had taken the *Mary* out. He had said nothing to Gilbert Lang. He simply kedged her out. As most people know who have looked at ships, in the days before tugs and steam, a ship moved about in shallow water, when the wind would not strike her sails, with kedge anchors. It is slow and laborious work, but there was nothing better.

The kedge was carried out ahead of the ship, dropped, and the line attached to it was used by the sailors on board to pull the ship along until it reached the kedge, which was then raised, again carried forward in a small boat, dropped, and again the ship was pulled. And so on until she reached her position or came into the wind. He could have caught the morning breeze and tacked out, but, most incomprehensibly, he did not do that.

Williams had used two kedge anchors, one being carried out while the other was being raised. It was faster. But, instead of making use of his speed, he had hauled back and forth in the narrow bay as if trying to tack under bare poles. Gilbert Lang had not known enough about ships to wonder at it, but Banoo and Nauma and other sailors among the native crew could not imagine what had got into him.

Such things as training and drilling, unless it is ritualistic, are inconceivable to the native. Williams did not explain. He simply kept them at it until they were able to do it without lost motion. Then he caught the wind and disappeared.

Gilbert Lang at first had slightly feared that perhaps Williams was sailing off, for he had packed most of the instruments and books and had his chests taken on board, but all of the Samoan and Tongan women and children were still in the village.

Gilbert Lang sat half-dreaming unpleasant things, wondering and nearly dozing. It was a peculiar, almost enchanted day. The sun was bright and warm, yet all around the trees were dripping moisture. The high brown cliffs, rough, jagged, wave-gnawed, revealed strange shades of color, and on their tops the thick bush made a covering of dark green.

On one side was the river that poured into the bay, and there mangoes flourished, sending their thick, twisted, snake-like roots down to the water. In some places

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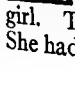
along the cliffs where trees had taken root, the rain had eaten away the rich black loam and left the trees tremulous on long roots that groped about for a firm anchorage, and in other places there were no trees, no shrubs, nothing but the hard, moss-covered rocks.

It was beautiful and held a certain barbaric wildness. Possibly there are in the world no finer scenic coast effects than in the Solomons—and none there surpassing those found on Bougainville's long shoreline.

Presently Gilbert Lang became aware that he was not alone. He had heard no sound, but he quickly turned his head and Uala was caught stealing upon him. She laughed gaily and dropped to the sand.

Uala wore a skirt of leaves. About her neck was a garland of leaves and grass tassels. Her hair was thick and long and dark and wavy, and she had caught it back at her neck to keep it out of her way. Except for a certain thickness of the nose and lips a little too heavy—"voluptuous" such lips are called—she had that perfection of beauty that is highly prized among cultured white men. All white people are called "civilized," and their nations are said to be "Christian," but the cultured caste are the Brahmins. Their taste is exquisite, and their sensitiveness to beauty makes them peculiarly susceptible to the annoyance of ever so slight defects.

No. Among the streets and lights of New York, Uala would not have been so beautiful. Her nose was not patrician; her lips had not the fine and delicate mobility of the famous beauties. But in the wilderness and among savages the nose that tended to broadness and the lips that were heavy might soon, in the eyes of even a very discriminating white man, be ignored. Her hair—true, a trifle coarse—was like a black aura; her dark eyes were deep as an atoll in mid-ocean, soft and tender. Her body was not like a Greek statue tanned and animated. It was richly brown, a body sun-kissed from the day of birth, and molded by the winds and waves into lithe symmetry—a body pulsating with life, the strength of life.



SHE lay on the sand at Gilbert Lang's feet and looked at him with the frank tenderness of a native girl. There was no immodesty about her. She had never worn the muslin gowns of the missionaries, and, like her heathen sisters, she wondered what was the matter with white women that they should so continually and carefully conceal their legs and breasts. Were they hideously diseased? Twisted? Certainly the legs were not strong, for who ever saw a white woman running and romping? Button herself up in one of those hot gowns that got in the way of her legs? Why? She could not understand.

"Why you here?" she asked him softly.

"I am just thinking!" He smiled as one might smile at a child.

There was much of the impulsiveness and petulence of a child in Uala. But she was a woman.

"What?"

"Oh, many things!"

"What?" she persisted.

"Everything. Anything. Just thinking."

"Some girl you like far away?" she asked pensively.

"No," quickly spoken.

"White girls are ugly," she said, speaking as one does who has given the subject much critical consideration and come to a definite decision.

But her observations had of necessity been limited to the few who came across her island paths—loyal women who came with missionary husbands, seldom robust in the first place and soon worn and harassed by the worries and work of the mission; women of another kind, haggard and dissipated, who came occasionally with traders; some tourists, mannish and spectacled, traveling safe routes and taking notes to write of the dangers they hazarded in the "cannibal" islands.

Gilbert Lang smiled at Uala's comment on white girls but covered the smile with his hand and turned his face slightly.

"You not happy?" she asked tenderly.

He looked at her quickly. The words, her eyes, the sweet solicitude of her voice struck vibrantly on his lonesome heart.

She was beautiful. She was sweet. She had the native's equivalent for neatness.

"Why do you ask that?"

"All time you look—" and she made a mimic face of his sad expression. "All time you stay by yourself. No laughs."

Silence came between them, and they looked at each other.

Then she said it. Bluntly it came from lips that had never been trained to repress

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tender emotions, no matter what efforts at stoicism might be made in other directions.

"I love you," she said in the matter-of-fact way that one might speak anything which was true and more or less obvious and without cause for shame.

"Uala!"

"I do," she repeated. Then apprehensively, "You no love me?"

Gilbert Lang was bewildered. He was bewildered not so much at the girl's simple statement as by the feelings that her words stirred within him. Conflicting feelings they were. He was shocked and glad. His lonely heart beat for joy, but the white-bred blood within him cried out in raging protest. She was a beautiful girl, warm and tender. She was a savage, a brazen, untutored heathen. One might forget the tormenting thoughts that beset him if one were in the sweet caress of her arms. But a savage—to love such a creature was unthinkable, but to seek her lips for an idle hour, to pretend love and some day leave her, all that to one of Gilbert Lang's parentage was even more remote.

Now it happens that loneliness is as an empty vessel standing ready to receive the first outpouring of love. The shades of ancestors within one's veins may fume and protest, but youth cries out to youth. Gilbert Lang in those memorable seconds did not recognize his conflicting feelings. He was agitated by a clash of instincts, not of thoughts. Honor of a very refined character had been so long in his family, and all that honor required had been so long punctiliously observed and so taken for granted that it would be observed, as to become quite instinctive.

But he was young, very young, overweighted with tragedy and heart-hungry. Youth loves love: the passions of the early twenties are as the torrents rushing down the rain-washed mountainsides.

But it also happened that Uala knew nothing of the struggle within him. She did not wait for it to be decided. Her hand went out and touched his. It slipped up his arm, to his shoulders and about his neck and with the gentlest of pressure brought him to her breast.

Kissing seems as silly to a Samoan—or did to the Samoans of that day—as rubbing noses would to a débutante in the arms of her first sweetheart. But Uala did not turn her lips aside, and Gilbert Lang, forgetful of who he was and where he was, stared rapturously into the depths of her dark, unfathomable eyes as he held her breathing breast against his own.

"I love you; I love you!" he whispered.

She answered soft strange words. It was no time to tax her brain with the labors of an alien tongue, which, in a way, had not been unfamiliar to her from childhood.

Long and quietly they sat together. Speech was as needless, would have been as futile, as humming while one sat listening to the music of the spheres. And there was, there always is, something cosmic in the wild rhythmic beat of two young hearts when they meet in their first embrace, heedless of time and race, of birthplace, caste and destiny.

At last she spoke the inevitable question of womankind, no matter where on God's great earth you find her——

"Always you love me?"

"Always!" he whispered recklessly.

"Me, too. No more you look—" and again the mimic of his sadness.

"No. And you, no more you make eyes at Banoo?" he asked unconsciously and half-playfully, falling into her manner of speech.

"Banoo? Good fellow. He like me."

Thus she again showed her kinship to universal womanhood and, secure in his promise of eternal love, teasingly tempted his jealousy.

"Banoo be no good fellow when I finish him."

Playfully she made a gesture of astonishment by putting her hand before her mouth and asked—

"You no hurt him cause he like me?"

"No. Not if you no like him."

"Oh, I no like him. I like you!"

And again the tight-locked embrace. Having played the game of words and teasingly coquetted and threatened—in the manner of a woman, in the manner of a man, no matter who or where—they came back into each other's arms to show that neither had meant a coquetting or threatening word of what had been said.

SUDDENLY a voice not many paces behind them cracked—

"Lang!"

Uala and Gilbert Lang turned as with one movement, startled.

Williams, grim and tense, stood behind them.

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Silence: interminable silence. Only the gentle rattle of the fronds and the distant, hoarse soughing of the surf and the faint note of some voice calling in the village.

It seemed that Williams would never speak. He appeared on the verge of a maniacal fury and straining as a man strains to hold back in the rapids that are sweeping him toward a whirlpool. The muscles of his naked body stood out in knots, and his eyes glittered. At last he said—

"Uala, go to the village!"

Silently she arose, her head lowered. "*Tofa!*" she whispered in parting to Gilbert Lang.

Tofa is the sweet Samoan word of parting: literally—ironically at this time—"Go to sleep."

She walked past Williams, but he said nothing to her. He did not look at her. His eyes were on Gilbert Lang.

At last, long after Uala had walked from sight, Williams' muscle-gnarled body relaxed, and, as suddenly, as unexpectedly, as he had come upon them, he swung around and strode off without speaking.

TO BE CONTINUED

BALSAM OF PERU

By EDGAR YOUNG

IT IS a noteworthy fact that "Balsam of Peru," so called, does not come from Peru, where the tree producing this sap is not to be found, but from the smallest of Central American republics, Salvador. This is another instance of products being misnamed as "Panama" hats were misnamed. "Panama" hats are really made by the Indians on the coast of Ecuador and are locally known as *jipi-japa* hats. They got their name in the old days by being brought to Panama and reshipped from there to Europe. Balsam of Peru got its name by being shipped to Callao, Peru, from whence it was shipped to Spain.

Its botanical title, *Myrospernum* or *Myroxilon Pereiræ*, should read *Salvatorense*, for it is only in a small stretch of territory between Acajutla and La Libertad that this tree is to be found. It is a leguminosæ, related to peas, beans and acacias, although of a giant variety. A full-grown balsam-tree measures about forty inches in diameter and attains a height of one hundred and twenty-five feet. The wood is very hard and durable and is used for making furniture. The outer bark is white and the inner bark a brick red. The tree bears a small white flower and produces a pale-yellow fruit containing one seed.

The trees are tapped by expert *balsameros* during the dry season—January to May. Care is taken not to injure the tree. The sap is collected on rags—*trapos*—which are thrown into kettles and boiled out and later poured into tin cases—*latas*—which hold about fifty-five pounds. It is then ready for exporting. German buyers have been obtaining the greater portion of the one hundred and fifty thousand pounds which is produced annually. "Balsam of Peru" is used as an antiseptic in treating skin diseases and blood-poisoning and has been injected for various lung ailments.

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Gauntlet's Log

by Captain Dingle

Author of "Out of the Wreck," "Timothy's Nautical Scoop," etc.

This is not a fiction story. It is the plain, straightforward record of an actual, and unusual, voyage—the log of the single-handed voyage of the twenty-eight-foot sloop *Gauntlet* from New York to Bermuda. The voyage is doubly remarkable because of the disasters encountered and because, so far as we know, it is the only single-handed trip ever made between those two points. It is of particular interest to *Adventure* readers from the fact that the "sole survivor," barring the dog, is Captain A. E. Dingle, well known to them as one of our "Ask Adventure" editors, a story-writer and a comrade at the "Camp-Fire."—EDITOR.

PERHAPS the first essential to a true presentation of the incidents of my single-handed voyage to Bermuda from New York in the twenty-eight-foot sloop *Gauntlet* is the disposal of the theory often put to me lately that my difficulties arose from my sailing on the thirteenth.

As a sailor of considerable experience, at least in years, I began long enough ago to have been shipmates with men who utterly believed in both the unlucky Friday and the ominous thirteenth. If I do not place any belief in such superstitions myself, it is because I am so constituted as to disbelieve many things which others believe, until I have proved their truth for myself. Here I may remark that the voyage itself is but an instance of this crank in my make-up. All the men I met—seamen, that is—said:

"It can't be done! It's the hurricane season! You'll lose out!"

Thus it came to be done.

But, returning to the thirteenth matter, I did not actually sail on the thirteenth. This must perhaps be whispered! My passports expired on the thirteenth of August, and, as I trembled at the prospect of going through the tedious formality of getting fresh ones, I went on board the sloop on the thirteenth of August and entered in my log that I had sailed and run aground. Thus, in reading this log, the reader is supposed to start with the second entry. Thereafter the matter in the article is copied verbatim—omitting several pages of figures for interest's sake—from the log itself.

One other small matter is that the voyage was not undertaken as a stunt. My family, including myself, were so wearied by the recent Winter and its accompanying shortage of fuel that all hands longed for less rigorous surroundings. Once Bermuda was decided upon, the question arose of means by which to take the *Gauntlet* down, for none of us wished to lose the little boat. Freight space is at a premium these days, particularly to Bermuda, where the only steamer running direct is a very irregular ex-cruiser, which is hard pressed to take actual necessities to the islands without carrying pleasure sloops.

Therefore I thought of sailing *Gauntlet* down. She had been down before, about twelve years ago in a Bermuda race, with a crew consisting of the owner and his wife

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with two friends. So, if four could take her, I considered two could do the same—and, at a pinch, one. At first, for a long time I tried hard to get companions, but without success. Americans whom I could have secured could not get passports; British subjects could only get passports there and not back—or at least so they told me.

Eventually I had to decide to sail alone with Trixie, my Airedale terrier. After arranging for my family's transportation and the export of the few belongings I felt must go, I came up against a formality not hitherto considered—the clearance of the sloop. An inquiry, when I was first contemplating the trip, brought from the Collector of the Port of New York the assurance that it would not be necessary to clear so small a vessel, which was not documented in the Custom House.

But, by the time I was ready to sail, rules had changed, and I found I had to take out clearance papers exactly the same as for an ocean-going ship. Before clearance could be granted me, I was told I must change the sloop's registry from American to British just for the voyage. This occupied more valuable time, and all the while the worst period of the year across the Gulf Stream was approaching.

However, I felt sure of making the passage in ten or fourteen days and gladly accepted the chance to sail when August fourteenth came around. This was actually the date of leaving New York. I received my Code Signal from the Navy Office on the afternoon of the thirteenth, and instructions which told me I must follow the coast to Cape Lookout, south of Hatteras, before making Easting; to run without lights and to answer no whistle signals, on account of enemy submarine operations.

A seaman will readily understand why I could never for a moment consider obeying those orders. They were issued on the assumption that the vessel receiving them was manned with a crew able to keep alert lookout and with hands to spare in an emergency. I had no crew and no hands except my own two. For the *Gauntlet* to have run down the coast without lights, right along the coastwise steamer lanes, among countless vessels also running without lights, meant sheer suicide, and I refused to think of it. My course lay offshore, and the moment Sandy Hook was cleared the *Gauntlet's* nose was aimed for an offing as far offshore as possible. So, while other troubles came in plenty, I was never, so far as I know, in danger of being run down. I carried lights. The actual log follows:

AUGUST 13th, 1918. Got under weigh at 8 P.M. Grounded on bar. Lay-to all night.

August 14th. Under weigh again at 11 A.M. as soon as morning tide made sufficiently to cross the bar. Ran down to Prince's Bay and made number to the guardship. 2 P.M. Passed out Sandy Hook. Hot and very small breeze. 4 P.M. Ambrose Lightship bore east, one mile distant. Course southeast. 5 P.M. Black squall out of N.E. got me with some of new gear jammed. Split new jib and mainsail. Wind all around compass, then two hours flat calm. Shifted sails and ran under the jib all night.

August 15th. Loosed mainsail at dawn, but smart gale from north blew all forenoon. Tied up mainsail; made fair course under jib alone. Trixie very sick. Log registered seventy-one miles at noon. Latitude 39° 38′ N.; Longitude 73° 06′ W.

August 16th. Mostly calm to midday. Made three miles in six hours. Set full mainsail at 5 P.M. Log reading 120 miles.

August 17th. Faint airs. Very hot. Barometer 30.26, rising. Passed mass of wreckage which was alive with sharks. Believe bodies must be among the wreckage; sharks are fighting and tearing furiously. Calm, with high swell at N.E. Log 166 miles. Lat.: 38° 06′ N.; Long.: (D. R.) 71° 51′ W.

August 18th. Overcast, stormy sky. Trixie appeared from beneath the upturned boat and had her first meal of the voyage. Gosh! Gale set in from N.E. and blew hard all day. Had intended taking my spells of sleep during daytime; have not succeeded in sleeping yet. Doze at the wheel sometimes. Opened box of candies my little girlies put on board for me. Water has made them very goojey. Log at 6 P.M. 297 miles. Barometer steady. Trixie disgustedly put her generous meal back at my feet.

August 19. Breeze appeared to moderate in forenoon but developed in afternoon to high gale from N.E. Boat is straining badly in the high seas. Made 116 miles these twenty-four hours on S. by W.

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course. Cold and raining. Barometer not very reliable. Probably set too high. Has rarely given correct warning. Lat.: 34° 40′ N.; Long.: 70° 57′ W. Both dead reckoning. No observation obtainable.

August 20th. Moderated in A.M., but seas still lumpy. Sloop is leaking badly. Pump every four hours. Series of squalls; then gale settled down afresh at 5 P.M. At 11 P.M. lost second jib and split second mainsail. Cut away raffle and bent only complete spares. Job took five hours of hard work. Log continually fouled with weed. No observation.

August 21st. Laboring heavily. Leak seems worse. It is on starboard side forward, apparently in chainplates. In violent pitching of the sloop, the sixty-gallon water-tank got stove in. When discovered, every drop of water had gone into the bilges. Only have the two emergency bottles in the lifeboat, some two gallons. Up to noon made 108 miles S. by E.; first time have made anything near proper course worth entering. At 1 P.M. broke my sextant in a fall and hurt self badly in awkward tumble on coaming of cockpit. Patched up sextant and adjusted it by wedging the horizon glass straight with small wad of paper. But lost the chance of a sight. Same lurch that flung me and sextant down threw chronometer out of bed into water. Leak gaining. Pump every two hours now. No fear of getting too much sleep. Unless decent change comes, shall hoist ensign, union down, tomorrow. Lat.: 31° 41′ N.; 70° 39′ W. Both dead reckoning.

August 22nd. 5 A.M. Set full mainsail, roughly patched. Started to split again. Took it in. Ran under jib alone, making S. one-quarter W. Made 74 miles these twenty-four hours. At 6 P.M. stood north with three reefs in patched mainsail. Reckoning gives little to southward of Bermuda's latitude.

August 23rd. Stood north all forenoon. Log has not registered for unknown hours. No observation again. Latitude is uncertain; impossible to get longitude since watch stopped when flung into water on cabin floor. Restarted it by approximation, but utterly unreliable. Hoisted ensign, union down, at noon. Log registers 695 miles. Stops work often, owing to gulf weed.

August 24th. At noon got a sight. Lat.: 34° 29′ N.; Long.: 65° 52′ W. (Long by D. R.). Am above Bermuda's latitude. Stood south.

August 25th. Course to St. David's Head E.S.E., true. At noon log reads 723. Made course S.E. by E. until 5 P.M., more southerly then. Reckon 221 miles to Bermuda.

August 26th. Jogged idly all day. At 4 P.M. an American armed merchant steamer stopped in answer to my distress signal. She proceeded when I showed her my empty water-jugs. —— her! Course to Bermuda east.

August 27th. Second jib burst from boom in forenoon. Spent several hours making it good. Then stood northerly until 11 P.M. Lay to until morning. Sea getting up; thought to get ahead on rest. Can not sleep. Seem to have forgotten how.

August 28th. Sailed S.E. by E. Sea making up heavily again. Hove-to at noon to try for good observation. Made twenty-nine miles S.E. these twenty-four hours. Lat., by observation: 32° 35′ N. Long., dead reckoning: 65° 55′ W. Long. is doubtless in error. If longitude is anywhere near correct, should be about 50 miles from Bermuda reefs.

August 29th. Calms and faint easterly airs. At 2 P.M. heading S. by E. 6 P.M. calculated had again reached latitude to run down and stood east.

August 30th. Hove to and unbent jib, which had parted from the roping and had started to go altogether. Bent on the only remaining spare, a baby-jib, next to useless. At noon stood N.N.W. At 6 P.M. could lay no nearer course than S.E. Fell flat calm and lashed down everything to save spars and sails in heavy swell.

August 31st. 6 A.M. Light air from east. 10 A.M. drifting again. Made only ten miles N.W. these twenty-four hours. Breeze freshening at 12.30 P.M. Log reads 1,042 miles. (Direct distance to Bermuda from New York is but 670 miles. A. E. D.) 4 P.M. A small brown and yellow land bird settled on the rail and stayed all night. Spared it a spoonful of water.

September 1st. Wind freshening in puffs. Sounded, using logline with hand lead and ballast. Twenty fathoms. Rock and reef fish plentiful. Should put sloop about 30 miles S.E. of Gibbs Hill. Latitude has been correct; longitude apparently

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more greatly in error than imagined. All afternoon very faint air drifting about east.

September 2nd. Log 1,064 at 6 A.M. Dead calm. 7 A.M. Making bare steerage-way. Drifted nearly all these twenty-four hours. Feeling need of liquid. Dog looks pitiful.

September 3rd. Drifted three miles in four hours in forenoon. All afternoon calm and hot. Drifting about N.E. These two days of calm are blazing hot. May a sailor's curse rest on the master of that steamer that refused me water eight days ago. Last can of fruit and last tobacco gone today. One scant quart of water left for Trixie; six bottles of spoiled beer for me. Scared to drink it. Soured during previous shaking up. No more lime-juice. Log reads 1,075.

SEPTEMBER 4th. Barometer falling sharply. Faint breeze at 3 A.M. from N.E. Log 1,100 miles. At noon breeze freshening from N.E. Reckoning places sloop in latitude of the Islands. Whether longitude is in error too much or too little, shall find out in time. Have not seen a ship for nine days. Smoked ropeyarns mixed with tea today. Trixie and self had a waterless day for practise. No signs of land yet. Good thing, with rising wind. Reefs bad neighbors. Stuck two reefs in mainsail. Hope she'll hold together. Poor stuff. Wind and sea rising all the time. 5 P.M. Tacked to E.S.E. by compass. 9 P.M. Strong gale. 9.25. Mainsail started to go, cloth by cloth. 10 P.M. Three cloths left, in luff.

September 5th. 6 A.M. Tremendous seas. Leaking seriously. Barometer 28.80. Terrific gale. Sloop's gear a wreck. Pumping half an hour every two hours. Noon—baby-jib flew to leeward in ribbons. Weather growing more wicked. Something parting every minute now. Seas sweeping sloop. Can not stand or breathe on deck for the wind. Impossible to do anything more. Hanging on and hoping. Gale seems to have reached a climax. A watery hell. Lull about noon. Seas tumbling in from all sides. Caught basin of rain water. Sea came aboard and spoiled it. Wind shifted suddenly to S.W. and blew harder than ever. Sharp squall laid sloop down and carried away everything below. Looked for damage and found last fresh water upset. 2 P.M. Making drift S.W. by W. Log 1,179.

4 P.M. Complete hurricane. Swept heavily. Leaking all over. Through night the same. Sour beer smashed and lost. Not sorry. Poisonous, probably. Decks continually swept. Some time around midnight took big sea to leeward, where boat is lashed down. Burst lashings, carried boat away. Pitched head first down cabin and hit on head by a shrapnel fuse paperweight flung from a shelf in lurch. All below a wreck. Trixie buried under ladder and wreckage. Found boat had smashed in side of cabin house and, in going adrift, had smashed the main-boom four feet from mast. Very poor outlook. Broken boom is hammering at the hull, held by wire sail lacing. Cut it adrift after unknown hours of labor with chisel, holding on to shrouds when submerged and working when clear of water.

September 6th. Noon. Gale moderating. Raining hard, but have nothing left to catch water in. All impregnated with salt. Drifting under bare poles about one mile an hour easterly. Barometer rising slowly, but seas still very steep. Sloop is a wet, dreary horror below. My books, hundreds of them, all ruined—reduced to thick, viscid slime of paper pulp and paste.

(This, I afterward discovered, was the cause of my inability to keep the sloop free of water. The mess had choked the pump intake.)

All forenoon working to clear wreck aloft and make little sail. Got old split mainsail set to gaff, the torn part rolled up and tied with reef-points. Gear badly fouled aloft, and she won't head anywhere with no boom to spread sail and no headsail. Piece of ensign is flying yet. Hope something heaves in sight. Trixie is getting red-eyed. I am having queer dreams of big drinks; almost want to drink one big bucket of sea water. It looks so clear and cold. Can lay nearly east with this jury rig, but she steers like a barrel. Is getting somewhere though.

5 P.M. Can not steer with this rig. Maybe she'll head better with more wind. When that comes, I suppose it's good-by mains'l. No vessel sighted since last Sunday week—twelve days. Would like to buy a pail of water for twenty dollars. Dixie seems satisfied to get the liquor from a can of beans. I get the beans. Very

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thirsty. Hope next steamer we see will give us water. Longest spell I've thirsted lately. I could drink what Trixie drinks, but I hate to kill poor Trixie. She's so patient, though she's suffering badly. 6 P.M. Another windy sunset. Oh, well. Log 1,198. Seem to have made one mile since noon. Call it four miles, log does not register well at drifting speeds. All night racking around in dead calm again. Wonder if it ever blows anything but gales, head winds and calms here?

September 7th. At 7 A.M. light air, but again from east! Not enough to sail with, anyway. Hope for better as morning wears along. 8 A.M. Gosh, I'm dry. Wonder how the kiddies are making out. Have thrown my pistol overboard to save the dog. Her little share of liquid wouldn't help me to sleep when I thought of her. Well, well, if the kiddies only knew their daddy was less than fifty miles away, dismantled and helpless in a deathly calm, I wonder if they would get some man to ask the Navy patrol to seek me? To think that six hours of decent sailing would do it. My Nautical Almanac got washed to pulp with the rest in the hurricane; I have only guesswork now for my declination. Can anybody ever guess what's running through my brain this forenoon? That ancient children's jingle:

"Ibebbity bibbity sibbity sab——"

which ends:

"And out goes she into the middle of the deep blue sea."

Must shake this off. That deep blue sea is too awfully fascinating and inviting to fool with. Find bathing every half-hour or so, pouring a stream of water from the spout of the big kettle, is very refreshing and in a degree makes thirst less unbearable. But it's thirst just the same. My mind runs at present on my first order after stepping ashore, viz: One Imperial pint of beer. One large jug iced black coffee. One large can of peaches—with juice. One quart claret punch. One Imperial pint of beer. D.C. *ad lib:* Among the minor mishaps on this endless voyage, last night the clumsy mainsheet knocked the binnacle to pieces. 9 A.M., making east to northeast, steering wildly.

In case I should forget, here I want to set down that I am deeply grateful to whatever fate it was that forced me to make this trip alone. I would have blamed myself forever had another suffered as I am suffering. I'm not so fit as at one time to go thirsty. Almost a week ago I watched reef fishes like those one sees at the Aquarium, and I knew the Islands were close to. Today I see brilliant fishes again—and scan the windward skies with doubt. Log reads 1,207. Tried to chew a bullet to allay thirst. Unsatisfactory. Might be better if taken in the usual way. 7 P.M. Stowed sail to save it. Thrashing around on deep swell.

September 8th. Slept in fits most of the night, one spell for fifteen consecutive minutes. Awoke deathly sick. Tried chewing tea leaves today. Might be much worse. Beats the bullet. Worked up reckoning. Am due west of the Islands and about thirty miles distant. At 4 P.M. log reads 1,232. Log fouls often. At 8 P.M. stowed sail again to save it. The faint air that blows during the day seems always to die with the sunset. Flat calm at midnight. Am keenly listening for those reefs.

September 9th. Deadest calm yet. 5.30 A.M. Very faint air. My sextant is badly askew. Trying to adjust it, but the job is a rough one with the tools at hand. At 9 A.M. I shall take a sight for a St. Hilaire Line, which has given me the most satisfaction up to now. Gave Trixie a treat for breakfast—a big can of superfine salmon with lots of juice. Poor beast. I envied her that juicy meal. She is content today without water. . . .

HERE the actual sea-log ends. At this point, when I had begun to figure out my position line, a steamer hove into sight astern on the same course as myself. The continuation from this point is, in the log, as follows:

SEPTEMBER 9th. (Continued.) Not needed. (Referring to figures.) A ship is steaming down to me. This was an American patrol vessel, the *Niagara*, and she stopped to ask the trouble. I asked for water. She gave me water and a feed of juicy fruit—and a towline! See Trixie in more water than she can swallow. I almost burst myself. But the towline was sent down, and now the *Gauntlet* is making speed to the eastward, and all I have to do is to steer and write up the end of my log. This American

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more than atones for that other one. They refused me her name, but the courteous officer at the rail called her the Suicide Patrol. Well—may she and her men have all that life affords that's good. This vessel plucked me right into Grassy Bay. Then a fleet of eager Bermudians took my sloop in hand and moored her, steering, pumping, getting over the anchor—in fact, taking all the work out of my hands.

Ashore at 7 P.M. Family pretty glad to see me. People had been more than kind to my anxious brood while I was being pushed around in that hurricane. Nobody ever breathed it to my folks, but there was not a man in Bermuda—and they are all sailors by birth—who had not given me up in his heart. It was a relief to turn for a moment to my kiddies, who alone had faith in my lucky star. They expressed the same belief at the voyage's end as I had at the beginning—

"I knew you'd get here!"

BAD-MEN OF THE OLD FRONTIER

"BILLY THE KID"

BY E. A. BRININSTOOL

"BILLY THE KID," around whose short life a chain of historic romance has been written, was born—of all places for a frontier desperado to see the light of day—in New York City, November 23, 1859. His true name was William H. Bonney. His father died when Billy was about four years old, and his mother removed to Colorado and married a man named Antrim. The Kid has always contended that Antrim was the cause of his going to the bad.

At the tender age of twelve years he killed a man with a pocket-knife in a saloon row in a New Mexico town, and from that time on, until his death, July 14, 1881, Billy the Kid was the scourge of New Mexico and the entire Southwestern border. He was shot and killed by Pat Garrett, at that time sheriff of Lincoln County, New Mexico, about midnight in the little settlement of Fort Sumner, in an old adobe house occupied by a man named Pete Maxwell, under circumstances related further on.

Billy the Kid was but twenty-one years of age at the time of his sudden taking-off, but has been credited with the killing of one man for each year of his brief but exciting career. He was about five feet eight inches in height, and weighed about one hundred and thirty-five pounds. He had a keen blue eye, a rather long face and prominent front teeth. One peculiarity of the Kid was the fact that he almost continually smiled and was always light-hearted and buoyant. He had many friends who were taken with his pleasant manners and liberality.

Without going into details regarding the bloody career of the Kid, I will state that he was finally rounded up, in company with several other birds of the same feather, in the neighborhood of old Fort Sumner. He was tried, convicted and sentenced to be hanged, but the Kid was destined to escape the noose under the following circumstances:

Lincoln County had no jail wherein to keep the desperate youngster, but there was a big store building in the town where the prisoner was placed under guard for the three weeks or so prior to his execution. Garrett chose two men named Bob Ollinger and J. W. Bell to act as the death-watch.

On April 28, 1881, the Kid asked to be taken into the back-yard of his jail for a little exercise. On returning the Kid entered ahead of Bell—Ollinger having gone across the street to get his supper. A revolver was lying on the table as the Kid entered. He caught the weapon up, fired at Bell, the bullet striking against the staircase, glancing off and entering Bell's body. Bell fell dead in the yard outside.

Entering the next room, the Kid picked up the shotgun which his guards had been

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using, looked out of the window and saw Ollinger coming across the street from the restaurant. Just as Ollinger passed under the window, the Kid leaned over and remarked pleasantly—

"Why, hello, old fellow!"

Then he fired and shot Ollinger dead. He then smashed the gun across the railing, threw the pieces down on Ollinger's body and remarked—

"Take that to —— with you!"

Walking outside, with his shackles still on, he compelled a man to bring him a file, with which he liberated himself of his leg-irons. He next ordered a bystander to bring him a horse with which he rode away, again a free man.

But the career of Billy the Kid was fast drawing to a close. In July of that year it was noised about that he was in the habit of calling on a certain Mexican girl at Fort Sumner. Pat Garrett got wind of this through John W. Poe, one of his deputies and at present a prominent banker of Roswell, New Mexico. With another deputy named McKinney, Garrett started out to again round up the noted desperado.

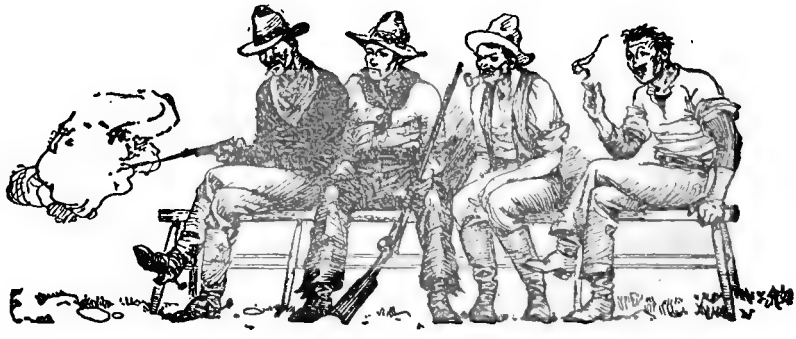
The three men watched at the house of the Kid's sweetheart until about eleven o'clock at night, but he did not appear. It was then suggested that the trio call on one Peter Maxwell, an old resident, with a view of ascertaining whether he knew anything of the Kid's whereabouts.

It was near midnight, on a bright moonlight night, when Garrett entered the Maxwell house, leaving Poe and McKinney on the porch outside. A few minutes later a man was seen coming toward the house. He noticed the two men on the porch and covered them with his gun, at the same time demanding to know who they were. Unaware that any one was in Maxwell's house, the Kid, for so it proved to be, backed into the bedroom—where Garrett sat in the darkness on the edge of Maxwell's bed, talking to him. The Kid approached the bed, at the same time asking Maxwell who the men were on the porch outside.

At the same time he became aware that Maxwell was talking to some one who sat in the shadows. Garrett recognized the Kid silhouetted against the bright moonlight and knew it was "now or never." Dropping off to one side of the bed, he reached for his gun, pulled it quickly and fired, just as the Kid also shot. Garrett's aim was true, and the Kid dropped dead in his tracks, the ball from his own gun burying itself in the headboard of Maxwell's bed.

Thus perished Billy the Kid, whose career of crime probably never was equaled by any frontier bad-man in the short space of time he cumbered the earth. Garrett credited the Kid with the killing of eleven men; others say nine, and some hold that he never killed any man without good and sufficient reason and in self-defense. In any event, this twenty-one-year-old desperado left behind him a reputation that will never cease to be the talk of that section of the United States, which at that time was as little known as the heart of Africa and peopled by some of the worst characters of the West. Never was life held cheaper, and the population knew no law but that of the six-gun.

The Kid was buried in the little military burying-ground at Fort Sumner, alongside several other desperate characters, all of whom had "died with their boots on."



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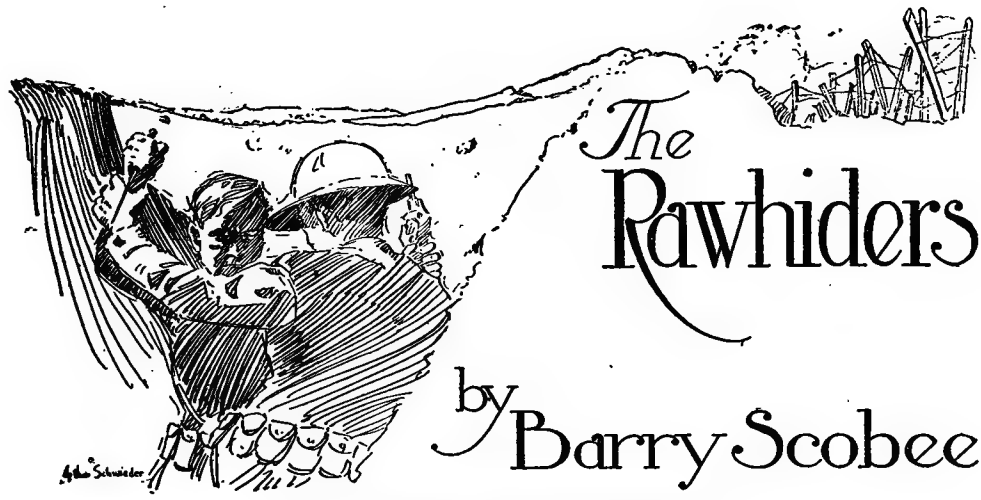

The Rawhiders

by Barry Scobee

Author of "The Steer Branded M-U-R-D-E-R"

THERE is an authentic case of a man deserting the Ninth United States Infantry because his comrades kept calling out at him—

"Ice cream cones, cones, five cents, a half dime!"

This man had told them that just before he enlisted he sold a thousand dollars' worth of cones in one month from a street-corner stand. It didn't have the ring, to them, of a story all wool and a yard wide. One or two remarked that it sounded fishy, in that frank way soldiers have. The man flushed and became angry. This was a signal for everybody to bait him, for the man who loses his temper among soldiers is lost, and in less than no time they were calling out whenever he was about—

"Cones, cones, five cents, a half a dime!"

They kept it up, just that good-natured, mischievous ragging, until the soldier could stand it no longer and "went over the hill."

One failing of the man was that he did not know he should not speak of his own affairs and feelings; another was that he did not know how to parry such rawhiding nor how to thrust back without anger. John Dormer, who came after him in another regiment, had the same failing.

"Big John" did not wait to be drafted; immediately after registration day he left his backwoods Missouri home and enlisted in a regiment of regulars. As a parting gift his father, a fire-eating Confederate veteran, gave him a well-whetted bowie-knife in lieu of a sword and the hinted admonition that all a soldier possessed was courage, honor and life.

John no sooner reached the recruiting-office in St. Louis than he began to be embarrassed by the many small contacts with his fellow men. He had never been away from among his neighbors, who held him in high esteem and deferred to his opinions and laughed at his jokes. They said among themselves that he took after his mother, who was one of those fine gentlewomen who are wise and gracious by the gift of God. So John had always been looked up to, born to the purple in a small way.

He did not know men in crowds. He did not have sufficient experience to meet the world well, and like his mother he gave polite deference to every person and expected similar courtesy in return.

The gang that held down wall benches in recruiting-offices in the days before all sorts of men began to swarm to the war was that same hard-headed all-man gang, ready to swear and as ready to laugh, that went over with the first convoy of the A. E. F. And it was this grinning, live-minded crowd that filled the benches when Big John Dormer walked in.

"Well?" demanded the recruiting-sergeant with a fierce scowl.

"I want to en-enlist," Big John said with a touch of his mild stammer that one never noticed after knowing him a day.

"You needn't be scared to death," the bald old sergeant snapped. "I don't bite."

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"Scared?" John repeated wonderingly, then grasped what the man meant. "I'm not sc-scared," he blurted, flushing with anger and embarrassment. "I st-stammer."

The hard-headed gang on the benches laughed, just a little snicker of amusement.

It made Dormer see red. He was hurt, too, that they should laugh at him, and, while he fumbled his answers to the sergeant's questions, his body broke out with perspiration and hot flushes seemed to be running over and through him. He trembled a little, and his thoughts were so flustered that he did not know what to do or say to defend himself, to explain. And that was one trouble—he was so sensitive to ridicule and injustice that he instinctively tried to explain and defend himself. In other words, he cared for these little things.

Then, to make his position worse—to him—he saw on the tail of a glance around at the benches a tall, lanky, freckled specimen of a soldier grinning straight at him and at the same time whispering into the ear of a neighbor. To John it seemed that "Freckles" was jovially imitating that stutter; his lips moved as if he were.

John wanted to fight, but he never had fought a round in all his life. He abhorred making an enemy; he preferred friendly relations, like a small chummy dog. So now he just sweltered it out inside himself. But, if any one impersonated his stammer—he resolved—he would . . .

He was speculating confusedly on just what he would do, when the sergeant broke in with a string of crackling words.

"All right; you're accepted. You men, all of you," he faced the crowd, "you're assigned to a regiment of regular infantry at San Antonio. You'll be sworn in there. We're ready to start for the train. Get into some kind of formation and don't be all evening about it! You," he jabbed a finger at Freckles, "you third-hitch man, you've been granted a furlough. Fall out."

In the regulars, face to face with the fine age-long traditions of the "most intelligent army in the world," Big John Dormer learned rapidly and took pride in acquiring military knowledge.

ONE forenoon after drill, when the men were loafing in the shade of the barracks porch, a tall lanky soldier, carrying a telescope satchel, came across the green grassy parade-ground straight toward the quarters.

"What is he?" asked the first sergeant idly from where he dawdled on the middle one of the three porch steps.

"I'll bet he's an old-timer t-taking on again," surmised Big John, he being nearest to the sergeant and proud of his growing knowledge.

It is a matter of pride with regulars to distinguish between a recruit and an "old-timer."

"What do you know about it, 'Cruit?" the top responded, not at all unfriendly but just quashing a recruit from habit.

John's sensitive face flushed. Instead of retorting with some quick, inoffensive answer—some Irish answer—he turned sullen and let his gaze slide off over the parade-ground into speculative distance, unseeing. He was angry. He resented such off-handed treatment. It hurt. And, to make it worse, he knew that the men there around him knew that he was angry and hurt and resentful and were either sorry for him or were getting ready to launch some subtle bit of baiting. Anything that he could do or say would be futile; so he sat there in sullenness.

The stranger came on toward the barracks and in a moment stood before the top-sergeant.

"This H Company?" he asked, then saw the letter over the door. "I'm assigned to this outfit."

His face bore the pessimistic scowl of a man who has just chewed and swallowed a spoonful of quinin, and his voice twanged with the steely ring of a razor when the metal is flicked. He presented a paper from headquarters.

"Eugene Hart," the top read as he sketched over the note from the sergeant-major. "Oh, yes, we got your D. & A. card. You been on furlough. Ol'-timer starting into third hitch, eh?"

"What did I t-tell you!" triumphed Recruit Dormer. "I knew he was an ol'-timer."

It was a boyish thing to do—a kind of vindictive triumph that exposed his feelings. An idle laugh floated around. He went sullen again. Then the new man looked across at him, and his grim mouth flickered into a surprizingly bright grin, an out and out grin of amusement. John recognized him as the man who had smirked in the recruiting-office.

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"Are you gr-grinning at me?" he demanded in a flare of wrath.

"Who? Me? I ain't grinning at nobody," the newcomer denied innocently, surprized apparently, but this innocence was belied by the way he kept grinning into John's angry gaze. "Is there something about you that would make me grin?"

Dormer slid his feet off the porch rail, dropped the front legs of the chair down with a thump and got up.

"Don't do it any more," he warned, leaning down toward Hart. "My st-stutter is my personal affair."

Another laugh floated through the crowd. Big John was being driven to desperation by his display of boyishness and lack of knowledge of how to parry, and how to grin and never mind.

Hart's mirthful mouth folded back into his bitter face, and the two regarded each other, trying to read what lay behind the foreheads. A dread had been in John's mind through the weeks of his service that somebody would mock his stammering, and now he saw something in Hart's face that was foreboding and that caused him to speak for the sake of future safety.

"Hart," he cautioned calmly, "don't ever mock my stutter. I'm wa-warning you!"

Hart's features did a lightning flash of mirth.

"I'll just have to some time," he returned softly, "now that you've dared me."

"If you do, I will give you a b-black eye."

This was the punishment he had decided upon, for anybody, and in his sore imagination he could feel the rim of an eye against the back of his big right fist.

At the threat Hart jerked back a step, and a peculiar look of alarm passed over him, for he also had a weakness.

"The man that gives me a black eye," he said with the wicked ring of his voice vibrating high, "I'll kill him."

"Cut it, you two!" the top cracked. "You men chop that wildcat stuff before you start it, see?" He regarded them a moment. "I'll fix you peppery gents right now. Come on. I'll make you bunkies so you will have to live peaceable—er slaughter yourselves right quick and have it over with."

They followed him to the second floor of the barracks. The room was broad and long enough to accommodate a score of white-enameled iron cots, a table, stove and three or four chairs. Next to Dormer's bunk was one unoccupied, which had been the source of the top's inspiration.

"That's yours," the sergeant directed. "Your foot-locker key's in the artificer's room. You can have wall locker number six. You all set?"

"All set."

The ol'-timer removed an o. d. blanket from his nondescript satchel, spread it over the mattress of the bunk and sat down. By tradition of the Army a man's bunk is his castle; so he rolled a cigaret and looked around the squad-room in the manner of a man who moves into a new neighborhood and surveys the outlook from his door-step the first evening.

Big John stretched out on his bunk, scarcely a yard distant. He was in a mess with himself; he abhorred being on bad terms with his bunkie, for that was gall to him. He wanted to be friendly; so he figured out a way to break the ice.

"Where have you been these last three months?" he finally asked with great deference.

"Oh, on furlough. Little vacation between hitches that Uncle Sam allows his good little soldiers. Where you been?"

"Right here."

"Yeah. You know San Anton' pretty well, maybe, then?"

"Fair."

The two looked steadily at each other, and each saw something that he had faith in back of the outward mask.

"Tell you what I'll do," Hart said decisively.

He snapped his cigaret toward a cuspidor. It missed, whereupon he proved himself to be a genuine ol'-timer, for, cleanliness coming first in barracks, he retrieved the snipe from the floor and put it in the receptacle.

"We'll make a truce," he went on, resuming his place on the bunk's edge. "I will put you wise to bein' a hero in khaki—carryin' a blanket-roll, diggin' practise-trenches, waitin' table—and you put me wise to the city as you get it from your private rubber-neck wagon, see? You know this Alamo burg, and I don't, see? And them big fists of yours look like a bodyguard to me."

The recruit was glad to agree. They

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were silent for a moment; then Big John leaned over very seriously.

"Hart," said he, "I wasn't t-trying to run a shindy on you down there. I was serious. I just want you to know that I won't be m-mocked."

"Listen, 'Cruit," Hart responded just as seriously, "you ought to get over that carin' what a man does or says to you in fun. The man who can't stand kidding in the Army is up against it." His face flickered with inner humor. "Besides, I got a failing—I got to mock a man that stutters. It's salt. It's fate. I just ain't got no say-so."

"I reckon you're not joking, but I'll b-black the man's eye——"

"And I'll kill the man that gives me a smoky lamp, see?"

"But that oughtn't to b-break up our trip tonight."

"Well, I reckon not!"

BEFORE they left for down-town in the evening, they made certain preparations.

When Dormer stood by the head of his cot, intent on dragging a comb through his brown bear hair before a mirror that hung on a nail in the window-casing, Hart bent over his foot-locker, after a furtive look around, and put a small-caliber automatic pistol into his right rear pocket. Then he strolled out with an assumption of nonchalance, twinging a match-stick with great accuracy into the open door of the cold wood-stove.

A moment later Big John bent over his foot-locker in the same furtive manner and strung on his trousers belt the bowie-knife in its black leather case, whose edges were worn slick and red. After which brief ritual he followed Hart, whistling "Tipperary" in an off key until he regained composure.

The reign of terror was on.

Hart was what is called a "character." In repose his face was bitter, twisted up like a shrinking leaf on a cold night, the victim of inward mental complexes. But, when there was some one to rag, some man's weaknesses to probe, that devil in man which is so egotistical popped out in triumph, to be expressed by him in cutting satire and mimicry that got under human skins like sand in a shoe. So pronounced was this changing in him, from bitterness to steel-pointed clownism, that the men soon dubbed him "Double Face."

That he should rawhide Dormer was inevitable, for Dormer took himself too seriously. A man has got to laugh at himself as he laughs at other men; then, lo and behold, he gains self-confidence and is an abler man for it—and is no longer rawhided.

"Say," Double Face said to Big John one night before lights-out had been sounded by the trumpeter on guard, while the men sprawled about their bunks half-clad, "how comes it you've got such big paws?"

"Milking," Big John answered.

A gleam of mischief shot over Hart, and he began to laugh ribaldly.

"Listen to this, men," he cried, going to the middle of the squad room, where all could see and hear. "Do you know what made Dormer's hands so hefty? Milking! Wouldn't he make a milkmaid you would like to kiss!"

He squatted on the floor in the position a man takes by the side of a cow and began an imitation of John milking. The men got on the grin at once.

"So, Boss, so! So, I say. Keep your tail outa my eye. You — old — fool! S-o-o-o-a-a!"

He pretended to hold a pail and milk into it.

John knew that he should take this in good humor. A year afterward he recalled the incident and knew that, if he had got out good-humoredly and, say, pretended to hold the imagined switching tail out of Hart's eyes, he would have killed the play against him and turned it harmlessly to Hart. But he didn't think of it. The best he could do was to stretch a sickly grin which the scoffers recognized as false.

Double Face scrouged down, opened his mouth and pretended to milk into it. The men loosed packs of howling laughter.

"You're a fool!" shouted Big John. "It's a lie!"

He sprang from his bunk and struck at Hart, and Hart, light as a playing kitten, sprang aside untouched. The failure infuriated John. He struck out blindly, time after time, while Hart dodged. Hart snatched up a pillow, bounded to the top of the table and, standing there, waved John away with it.

"Shoo! Shoo!"

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Big John turned on him anew.

Hart fled to a door, where, swinging from the top with one hand, like a monkey, he kept up the pretense of shooing John off by waving the pillow.

John was the company joke, the butt of their fun. He realized it in the midst of this and, suddenly broken, returned to his bunk.

"Men," Double Face panted, "don't you mock Johnnie now. He's peeved, and he'll black your eye."

Big John ignored this. Hart started on a new tack.

"Say, John, let me mock you, won't you? Please. Just once. I want to, Johnnie. Won't you, John, just this once?"

The men snickered and waited half-breathlessly for the big recruit to give them another Roman show. John got to his feet, and Hart leaped back from his taunting posture, but John was not after him. He walked from the room with great dignity and a pinching throat. And on the dark porch, where he sat for hours, the man all but wept in heart-breaking vexation at himself. Why did they torment him? Why couldn't he laugh it all aside and be untouched by such jeering?

The next day, when the few men about the squad-room were asleep or reading, old "Dad" Grey, patriarch of the company, tiptoed to John's bunk and sat down by the moping boy, slapping him on a knee in a fatherly manner.

"Say, kid," said he, "I've seen a lot like you since I come into this man's Army twenty-seven years ago—men that couldn't stand a bit o' rawhiding. Now don't get sore at me. I'm only talking to yuh like a born father. Don't you let 'em kid you that way. Don't you pay no attention. Just don't care what they say, plumb down inside of you, and then you can laugh."

"But how can I help caring? I——"

"Don't answer back what they say to you. I know. I've been ground between the stones myself, years back. Most men are. Like this, if a man says to you, 'Dormer, you're a fool,' don't you say back to him, 'You're another,' but say just offhanded, like it wasn't any news to you, 'Yeah, and I sure am lonesome.' That'll turn the joke more or less, see?"

"Yes, it sounds easy, but— I'm much obliged to you, though."

"That's all right. Be si—lo—what-you-call-it—sophical. Then you won't care, savvy?"

"Yes, thank you," John returned, not savvying at all.

Old Dad went away with a warm feeling for the boy. He had missed his afternoon's nap waiting for an opportunity to tell Big John that recipe.

John couldn't keep angry at Hart. He saw the futility of that and the disagreeableness it would bring them both; so he adopted the practise of being friendly at any time Double Face would let him be. And Hart was genuinely friendly, too. They liked each other, which was the paradox of the situation, for always the victim of rawhiding must have a friend or perish from off the earth with loneliness, and more often than not the rawhider is the man he makes up with.

"Say, old scout," Hart said along in the finish of an afternoon, "I wish you would do me a big favor."

"Nothing doing," John retorted. "What is it?"

"You saw me get to roll-call late this morning."

"A good little soldier like you!"

"Sure, but that didn't keep the top from taking away my pass privilege for a week."

"What's the point?" John demanded. "Haven't you got nerve to crack down?"

"Give me time; give me time. I've got a date for tonight and can't get off. Not unless, that is, you get a pass and sleep in my bunk until I get in."

This is a legitimate practise in the Army—so long as a man does not get caught. So that night, when the charge-of-quarters took bunk-check at eleven o'clock to see that all men not on duty or pass were in bed, John, who was listed as being on pass, was in Hart's bunk, swadd'ed head and heels, and Hart, who was supposed to be there, was off filling his engagement. Naturally, charge-of-quarters reported Hart in and everything as it should be. Had he been suspicious, however, and flicked back the blankets, John would have been sent to the guard-house. But what's the use of being a bunkie and not take a chance for a pal!

Next forenoon after drill Big John scooted down on his bunk to stretch himself and await the noon mess-call. He felt something bulky under his pillow. It was a package wrapped in newspaper, then

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oil-paper and finally the half of a fat fruit-cake was revealed. About the instant that John's eyes bulged open, Hart was making it on tiptoe for an exit.

"Hi there, Double Face," John shouted, "come back here."

Hart returned abashedly.

"Did you muss up my bunk with this junk?" John demanded.

"I—I'd eat my fill," Hart fenced. "I didn't care for it."

"Quit your swearin' to a pipe-dream," John admonished. "That girl gave you this last night, and you haven't had a nibble. I can tell. There's no crums around your bunk."

John's big paws broke the cake into two equal parts, and one of them he crammed into Hart's hands.

"Thanks, thanks," Hart mumbled. "You kept the biggest half."

"You're a liar," Big John retorted tranquilly. "How'd she happen to give you this?"

"No savvy. Maybe—" His face turned humorous. "Did you ever hear about old Dad when he went to the sergeant's wedding? Well, you know ol'-timers like him have got the prerogative for grumbling nailed down for keeps. All soldiers have, far's that goes. We've got to grumble er bust. Old Dad got invited to the wedding. 'Expect me to take the bride a present,' he went around grumbling. 'They're going to have some eats,' he said, too; 'guess they'll want me to pay for my lunch.' Well, the captain heard about it and made a bet with the chaplain that old Dad 'ud find something to grumble about at the wedding and would grumble, too.

"Dad went. When he got back, the top tolled him to the orderly-room door, where the captain and chaplain were inside. 'How'd the feed go?' the top asked. 'All right, all right,' said Dad. Then he pushed back his cap and began to scratch his head ruminatively. 'But they must 'a' been something wrong with it,' he grumbled, 'er they wouldn't 'a' give it to us.' So, maybe this cake——"

"Wasn't anything missing about my half," said Big John.

THERE soon came a culminating incident in Big John's experience, brought on by his mother in all innocence. One afternoon he entered the squad-room and at once sensed an ominous silence. Men lying or sitting around affected to be sleeping or profoundly occupied, but he felt them watching him.

Propped against his pillow was a letter, and, as he stooped to pick it up, he was enlightened as to the tense waiting. The envelope bore the superscription:

POLICEMAN JOHN DORMER

He broke the seal and read, and the men gave him time to fold the pages and get them back into the envelope. Then Hart sat up, his sandy face pert and greedy for the fun.

"What you been tellin' your folks?" he demanded in mock suspicion.

Every pretender in the room took obvious notice.

"I wrote my folks," John began with immense dignity, "that I was kitchen police——"

"And didn't tell 'em about what that was, eh? Didn't tell 'em that meant you was washing dishes and waiting table. Wrote home like this: 'Dear Ma. I am kitchen police, and you ought to see me in my uniform bossing the big cooks around and telling 'em——"

"My mother just thought——"

"Oh, sure!"

"Confound you," John flashed out, "don't you accuse me of deceiving my parents, or I will——"

The room broke into hisses and catcalls at his threat.

Now entered "Snooker," so called for some intangible reason. He was one of those poor unfortunates who believe that a crowd is dead against the man it laughs at. He was no judge of values. He wasn't especially mean, just unfortunate in his liking to step on the under dog with the hope of gaining favor for himself.

He strode over to the foot of Big John's cot.

"And you're the guy," he commented nastily, "who's got his bluff in here. You'll black a man's eye if he mocks you! Well, I'm a-going——"

"Hold on," cautioned Dad Grey, hurrying up. "You've got no license to cram in here."

"No?" sneered Snooker. "Watch me. Dormer, I'm a m-mocking you, he-hear me?"

Big John swung his legs off his bunk,

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but, before he could rise—and satisfy the eager audience as to what he really would do—Dad Grey, full of leathery strength, shot out an arm, and Snooker went staggering backward.

"There's a black eye for you, Bub," he commented to John with some triumph.

John chanced to observe Hart. Double Face was gripping the side-piece of his iron cot with both hands, and his eyes were staring in horror at Snooker.

Two or three men assisted Snooker to his feet and advised him to see the cook for a slice of beefsteak to keep down the color of the bruised flesh. Snooker slipped away silently.

Then the audience beheld a new diversion. Hart swayed to his feet and faltered toward the cuspidor in the middle of the floor. His face was white—some said later—as white as the fleece of a laundered sheep. He pitched to his hands and knees and retched in agony. Big John kept silent until Hart returned to his bunk.

"So," he commented then, "that's the way a black eye serves you, eh?"

"Go to ——!"

"I reckon that's what makes your face so sour—a kind of perpetual dread."

"That will do," Hart warned. This was his weakness.

"Why don't you m-mock me now?" John taunted.

Hart's rawhiding had turned him into a rawhider at last.

Double Face's audacity was limitless. He leaned forward until his pale face was close to John's, and he repeated with his lips, making no sound—

"Why don't you m-mock me now?"

John struck swiftly at him, but Hart was very agile, and he dodged and scrambled away.

That was one of Hart's methods thereafter of ragging John—mocking him with his lips but not with sounds. It never failed to enrage John, though now he rawhided back. The men snickered at him just as much, but he got satisfaction from rousing Hart sometimes.

"One of these days," he would say, "your tongue will slip when you're m-mocking me with your lips, and I will——"

"What will you do?"

"Paint your r-right eye."

"Then what will I do?"

"Nothing," John would surmise, yawning indifferently.

"No?"

Then one day the ol'-timer went a step farther.

"Look at this," he invited.

He displayed a cartridge for his Springfield rifle. The steel jacket of the bullet was cut away at the point, leaving a soft nose of lead.

"A dum-dum," he informed.

"What's it for?" John asked in pretended innocence.

Hart pressed the cartridge nose against his bunkie's shirt, over the heart.

"You don't say!"

And so it went, taunting and baiting. Either of these friends would have given his blanket to the other on a cold night, but neither could concede so small a thing as that the other had the best of him. They loved each other but were in secret terror of the imp of temper and mastery that every one hundred per cent. man knows lies in the breast of every other all-man.

"I've changed my tactics about plunkin' you in the gully-goozer," Double Face remarked casually one day. "I don't want that steel plate to ricochet the bullet."

"Steel plate?"

"Ah, I know you wear it there in your left shirt pocket. When you went to the gym this morning, you left your shirt layin' on your bunk. The sergeant come up looking for that list of clothes you want to draw from the Q. M. He——"

"What did he say?" John asked curiously and thereby betrayed himself.

"Oh, ho, pal. The sarg didn't look in the pocket. But you done give yourself away."

"Where will you aim, then?" John went on, ignoring the trap he had stepped into.

"Your left temple, I expect."

"What will you shoot with?"

"Springfield. What else?"

"What if the gun-rack's locked?"

"Wait till it ain't," Hart replied.

"What will I be doing while you're loading up?" John kept on.

"Nothing."

"No?" Big John was caustic.

He strode to his wall locker and returned with his bayonet, which he held down before Hart's eyes, and displayed the edge of the blade, thumbing it delicately.

"Razor-sharp," Double Face said in

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genuine surprize. "When did you do that?"

"On prison-guard at the Q. M. storehouse the other day. Found an oilstone."

"What's it for?" Hart knew; so he yawned with exaggerated nonchalance.

Big John lightly passed the flame of steel across his bunkie's stomach. Double Face flinched almost imperceptibly.

"I'm not threatening you," John explained.

"Sure not. Neither am I." And Hart held up the dum-dum.

JUST what effect the sharpened bayonet had on Double Face was revealed a few days later. To make the incident clear, a bit of ancient Army history must be brought out—as ancient as ten years ago. As late as the Spring of 1908, at least, Springfield rifles had nickeled bolts, instead of the blue bolts they carry now. In those days the soldiers bought burnishers to keep the bolts bright and shining. The burnishers consisted of small square mats of steel rings, the mats about the size of a man's palm. They resembled chain mail. When blue bolts came in, burnishers went out, and in many companies a pile of them could be found in most any artificer's room.

On the occasion of Hart's tripping up, the men were stripping for a bath on the banks of a creek, where the company had stopped on its weekly ten-mile hike. John observed Hart holding back, reluctant to strip.

"Come on," admonished John in a what's-the-matter tone. "'Fraid you'll get wet?"

"Yes, hurry up, Hart," the captain instructed. "Why don't you go on and peel off?"

The whole company stopped to look and listen, and it saw Hart strip with a final jerk, leaving a bandage over his stomach—a bandage made of burnishers.

"What's this?" the commander asked, picking up the thing as Double Face flung it down. "What's this chain mail for?"

"Why, Captain," began Hart glibly, "I didn't have no flannel abdominal bandage, like we used to wear in the Philippines, so——"

"That will do!" The captain turned to Dormer. "Do you know anything about this?"

"No, sir."

"But you urged him to undress. You must have suspected——"

"No, sir; I never saw it before."

The officer turned to Hart.

"Has this threatening and hazing between you two men gone so far as to——"

"Threatening? Hazing?" Hart repeated incredulously.

"Don't let me hear of any more of it," the captain cautioned them, flinging the anti-bayonet mail into the water disgustedly.

Double Face believed in heading off badinage before it reached him. As soon as they were back at quarters, his bitter face dissolved to a mischievous gleam.

"Hey, Dormer," he began reproachfully, "ain't you ashamed to betray your bunkie that way?"

"Betray?"

"Tellin' the captain on me."

"Oh, I'm sorry it happened that way, but I didn't betray——"

"No, no," rose derisive cries over the room. "What'd yuh call it?"

"Rank betrayal," vouchsafed Double Face. "Pointed out to the skipper that I was slow about undressing."

"But I had no thought of betraying. Don't say that. Somebody might believe it."

"'Fraid of the truth?"

"Say, ka-confound you, Hart, don't stand there and try to kid me."

Hart mocked him then with his lips.

"Why, ka-confound you."

John sprang at him, and Hart fled. He ran to the porch and climbed one of the posts in mock terror. John controlled himself in time not to make himself ridiculous. But he was sick at heart over the way they treated him. Accusing him of betraying a friend, a thing his old father had taught him never to do! Joking him about it. Not giving him a chance to explain. Rawhiding him. That night he wrote a letter to his father and spilled over with hot complaint, something he had struggled not to do.

"I am mighty tired of it," ran the letter. "I have tried not to let them make me the butt of the company jokes. I am not an idiot. I am not a laughing stock as we always thought of one. I am not like 'Humble Charley' at home, nor the simple Coggans boy. The men here keep at me

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because I lose my temper. Other men let such things roll off them like water from a watch crystal. I wish I could, but I can't. I guess I take things too seriously. Anyway, I am sick of it, and I am going to quit. I am coming home. That will bring less disgrace than what I will do if I stay here, and at home we can get things straightened out some way, even my desertion."

He sealed and stamped the letter and went to bed. But not to sleep. He lay there dreaming open-eyed of his home and his mother and how fine it would be to return, to be at home again with friends. As the hours slipped silently by, he found himself fancying his father and mother at the gate beholding him approaching along the dusty road, and, when he got close, he found a look of horror upon their faces.

"Deserted!" they exclaimed incredulously.

He fumbled on the window-sill for the letter and tore it into scraps.

He was more savage after this, causing even Hart to be more cautious, but his increased aloofness did not make him happier. And his and Hart's rawhiding was more of a silent, insidious affair. Hart would lie on his bunk and toy with the dum-dum, and Big John would get his sharpened bayonet and conceal it carefully under his pillow. All for each other's benefit. Neither knew of the other's hidden weapon—the little automatic and the bowie-knife.

THEN the regiment went into the hopper of the war mill on the Western front.

Each man had his adventure in No Man's Land, time and again, until the journeys became as commonplace as the facing of death can be commonplace. One mean, misty night the duty roster so coincided in its parts as to throw Big John and Hart together, with four other men, for a trip of investigation to the German lines.

The Boches were suspected of having cut paths through their wire in preparation for a raid, and the major of the intelligence section wished to make certain. Before midnight the six took bombs and trench-knives and set out.

"Good luck to you-all," the soft voice of a Southerner drawled as the adventurers passed a machine-gun emplacement.

"Good luck," whispered a man at a listening post, where they scrambled up and into the bleakness of No Man's Land.

"Aw, go to ——," an irritated voice hissed back.

"It's a bad-luck night," complained Double Face to John.

The party moved forward cautiously through the mud and ruck of past battles—limbs of trees, human bones, the wheel of a truck and a broken baseball bat that the Americans had flung over their trench. At last they reached Fritz's wire and began groping along it, to discover presently that a German party was coming out. The Yankees, with the intention of getting to their own lines and sweeping No Man's Land with bullets to kill the German patrol, moved homeward rapidly and quietly, too, until some man stumbled and fell with the booming smack of a barn door.

In the half second that they held their breath, the Americans heard the Boches start back to their own line on a run. The Germans had only a few rods to go, and the Yankees two hundred yards or more. The Germans were in their trenches before the Americans were half-way across the territory, and they opened with a storm of machine-gun bullets, flares and a second later with shrapnel that laid a barrage ahead of them and began to move back—a booming, flashing curtain of death.

The Yankees kept on. They even got through the barrage without any man going down. Then Big John Dormer stepped on a wooden barrel hoop with his left foot, caught his right as the ring turned up, and down he went. Something like a helmet or a round stone seemed to rise up and hit him a blow in the stomach. For a moment he heard the foot sounds of his comrades going on and dying out in the racket. He gasped for breath, and his throat crimped until he thought in a hot flash that he was choking.

He gave himself up for lost; then the sound of returning steps reached his ears. It all took place quickly. He was still gasping when a hand seized his collar and jerked him to his knees.

"You hit, John? You hit?" Hart demanded anxiously.

"No," Big John managed to groan.

"Let's make it for this shell hole then. This show's gettin' wickeder. It'll stop pretty soon."

He half-carried, half-rushed John to a shell crater gawping in the light of star

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shells and explosions a dozen yards away. Together they slid down its slimy sides of mushy mud.

In the comparative safety they panted and gasped a brief time. Small-caliber bullets cracked overhead, just as they had cracked over their heads in the target-pits at home. Shells screamed above and on all sides, and sometimes one burst close by with a blinding flash and spatter of mud that made them bat their eyes involuntarily. The nearer ones frequently threw fragments or gobs of mud into the pool of water in the bottom of the crater.

The two tried to make themselves rest easy by lying back, side by side, against the sloping wall of the hole. They kept sliding down at first, until their heels had dug deep holes so that they could brace themselves. The mist that had blown for hours, cold and penetrating, turned slowly to rain, rain that became heavier and heavier until it was little short of a deluge. There was no let-up of the bombardment that Fritz had turned loose, though now the shells were falling in and beyond the American trenches. The two had not the slightest shelter from the rain that beat into their faces.

Hart snarled savagely, exercising the prerogative of a soldier to grumble.

"Can't even roll a cigaret in this flood."

"I had a letter written with an indelible pencil," John complained, "and now I'll b-bet it's run in my pocket."

Then he giggled, for under just such adversities was he irrepressible.

They were silent a while, for talking was something of an effort; to be heard above the racket they had to turn their lips to a few inches from each other's ears. Yet, after all, that had become almost a habitual manner of speaking.

"War sure is hell," Double Face commented after a time, as if he had just discovered how right the other ol'-timer had been.

"Wet feet?" jeered Big John.

"No, you rummy. I had a date to eat pie—apple pie—with Salvation Army Annie down at the hut tonight."

"And you were going to bring me half of it! War sure is——"

"Like blazes I was."

They turned sullen as the night wore on. The cold steady rain, the continual nerve-blasting thunder of the shells, the mud that sogged in their shoes and oozed through their clothes where they lay back in it, made them weary and dull, made them hate war, hate the Boches, made them long to charge and have the misery over with in the hot flush of slaughter. Mud and weariness are harder than explosives and flying metal for a man to bear.

"Must be three o'clock," John surmised once.

Hart's answer was to spit viciously.

Lying back, they had to endure the agony of cold water penetrating their shirts and trickling in drops of tortuous slowness down their ribs. If they changed position and sat forward, the clothing fell away from their chests so that streams of rain, entering at their collars, rolled down their quivering breasts and stomachs.

"Say!" John cried in sudden alarm as a star shell turned their faces to a deathly chalkiness. "You've forgot your gas-protector. What if Fritz'd gas us!"

"No danger," complained Hart.

"Well, do you want him to?"

"I wouldn't care a hang."

"Say, I'll bet that sour face of yours is looking like one of those monkey gargoyles we saw in Paris. You disgust me."

"Yours would, too, maybe, if——"

"If what?"

"If you'd been afraid all your life of being hit in the eyes. It—I was born that way—and these flying shell-scraps make me crimpy in the stomach every time—and I've always been afraid somebody'd hit me in the face—you; —— it, I ain't afraid, but I'm——"

"Get lambasted once," said John, "and you'll get over it."

AT DAYBREAK the clouds sailed away like a departing ship, and the sun came out to get in a day for itself, bright and hot as a furnace fire. The bombardment increased with the light. Shells no longer danced in No Man's Land, except one now and then of big caliber falling short. But the heavy thunder of shells overhead and their quivering detonations forward kept on jagging at their nerves.

The sun burned hot and hotter. It poured into the shell crater and boiled up a steamy sickening offense that one meets in bending over a steeping kettle of soiled clothes. An invisible vapor began to crawl up like slimy reptiles from the pool

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in the inverted apex of the crater, and it bore the stench of putrid human flesh. A Boche helmet to one side of the water was a sort of index. The liquid was black and looked to be thick and nasty.

Mud dried in the fabric of their clothing as the forenoon advanced. Dry mud, rubbed from their hands, left their fingers gritty and unsensitive. John's tin hat was gone, and he could feel the oil of his hair almost frying hot. Hart's canteen had been pierced by a bullet, and the pint of water in John's was drunk early in the morning. Perspiration trickled down their flesh as cold water had trickled in the night. And above all was the ceaseless jarring of the earth by the blasts of heavy shells.

Noon arrived, and the sun poured straight rays on them, blistering, burning. They were nauseated and set to panting by the heat and the stench from the pool.

Hart rolled a cigaret and asked John for a match.

"You know I don't carry matches," Big John growled savagely.

With childish peevishness and disgust Hart flipped the cigaret away. He glared at John with blazing, bloodshot eyes.

"No match, eh?" he sneered. "Blast you!" he stormed suddenly. "I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for your —— clumsiness, you——"

"Why, —— you!" John cried. "—— you! You ca-call me clumsy. You've caused me more misery since I enlisted —say, mock me once, just once. I ask *you*—I dare you. Are you afraid?"

Imagine the two sweaty, thirsty, hungry and nerve-wracked boys and recall that homely expression, "mad as a wet hen."

The two bent toward each other from their half-reclining positions, glaring like savage beasts. Then something happened that had been happening frequently ever since the bombardment began, except that now it was on a larger scale. A great shell burst somewhere beyond the horizon of the crater, and a stone the size of a gallon pail came sailing heavily along, turning over and over, and fell with a great splash into the putrid pool. A vicious tongue of the nasty stuff shot square into Hart's face. He spat viciously once, then shut his jaws in grotesque and futile anger, while the whites of his eyes shone from the dripping mask of black liquid in ridiculous rolling.

"Ho-ho-ho!" roared Big John in half-mad laughter. "Ha-ha-ha!"

"You—you—listen," said Double Face with studied calm, "hear m-me, I'm a m-mocking you."

Both men rose to their knees. John smashed out with his fist and struck Hart heavily in the right eye. Hart bent backward but was up again instantly, reaching inside his shirt. Their trench-knives were forgotten. John reached within his shirt. Simultaneously out came the bowie-knife in John's hand and the automatic in Hart's.

Before Hart could fire, John grasped his right wrist and held the gun pointed away. With his own right he swung wickedly at Hart, and Hart was fortunate in grasping John's right wrist. So there they were, tied in each other's grasp, each afraid to let loose. They began to struggle, dragging each other about, panting, cursing.

They got to their feet and slipped down immediately, still keeping their holds. Up again, only to fall into the edge of the water. Then by mutual inclination they began to climb up the muddy slope to gain the level of No Man's Land, where they could fight out their wrath on solid footing. Up the slope they toiled and panted and slipped. Then with a bounce they were in the open.

A machine-gun's pellets began to crack about them. It played around as a fireman's hose sweeps a street. They twisted like two giants in a struggle for supremacy. Shrapnel began to burst near, and smoke clouds rose and spread. But for a moment the two Americans were miraculously saved.

They might have been the last two men of the world, fighting for a foothold above the conflagration of the earth.

Then into John's mind, bent earnestly upon his mad work, there popped a thought which relaxed his taut muscles and sent a chuckle of laughter bubbling up. Here he was with a thousand deaths crackling past him, fighting over so small a thing as being mocked! The situation was funny, suddenly. In a God-sent flash he saw how silly, how small and insignificant, had been all that seriousness; how puny his little fears. He was overwhelmed with the absurdity of the past in the face of the present.

With a mighty shove he broke holds and sent Hart staggering backward. Then he straightened, threw back his head and

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laughed, laughed in genuine bubbling laughter that was free of all things except amusement.

For a moment a look of alarm and amazement was in Hart's face, as if he feared Dormer had become insane; then he laughed, too, a little puzzled, a little shamefacedly, but on the verge of grasping the situation as John saw it.

Then the sweeping bullets found them, and they went down together.

SOMETIME the next forenoon, lying face to face on some straw in the ruins of a stable far back of where the German first line had been, their shoulders bandaged in white wrappings, their brains cleared, Hart stared at John speculatively for a while.

"I mocked you," he finally remarked, feeling out his late adversary.

It was a half-hearted attempt to rawhide, but John felt no anger. Instead, the absurdity of his past seriousness came over him again.

"You're some punkins," he said lightly and giggled with amusement.

He knew then that he would never care again for what men said of him in a joking way. They simply didn't matter.

"I don't mind this smoked lamp either," Double Face said, a sort of awe upon him.

CHANTEY

BY ARCHIE AUSTIN COATES

BEFORE I was a sailor, my life was spent on land;
I lived in crowded cities, and I wore their scarlet brand;
But, when I shipped it eastwardly, a change came over me.
I found that there was nothing like the wide, blue sea.

Ref. So let the waves go rolling,
And let the winds go blow.
A sailorman's a free man
As only sailors know.
The town is neat and handy
For girls and gaietee,
But Life is worth the living
On the wide, blue sea!

I sailed the old Atlantic a dozen times or so;
I swung Cape Horn and coasted it as far as Callao;
I saw Siam and India and crossed the China Sea;
I found the land was nothing for the likes of me.

So let, etc.

A sailorman's a free man, and none can tell him "No."
He packs his bag and ships it anywhere he wants to go;
He wanders up and down the world, from cradle to the grave
And finds his last Snug Harbor underneath the wave.

So let, etc.

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Local Option in Loco Land

by W. C. Tuttle

Author of "Dirty Work for Doughgod," "The Color of His Boots," etc.

ME AND "Dirty Shirt" halts our burros and peers at the proclamation. There she is, tacked to a tree beside the trail for all men to see. We spells her out loud, and then we sets down to try and figure out the meaning.

VOTE FOR LINDHARDT CADWALLADER SIMS FOR SHERIFF AND DEFEAT THE DEMON RUM

Me and Dirty looks at each other.

"Lindhardt Cadwallader!" snorts Dirty. "My ——, what a name!"

"For a sheriff," I admits. "Yaller Rock needs us, Dirty Shirt."

"And defeat the demon rum," peruses Dirty. "Who's he, Ike?"

"Not being a mind-reader, Dirty, I has to remain silent. I feel that we will find our answer in Piperock town."

Me and Dirty Shirt Jones are just getting over our annual hunch that we know where there's some gold. Said hunch takes us away from the flesh-pots in the gentle Springtime, and there's almost a smell of snow in the air when we returneth back, chastened in spirit, short on spondulix and hairy as to face.

Our faith in our own county is about on a par with our hunches when we reads that "Scenery" Sims is candidate for sheriff. Scenery is only a cipher in a country where men talk in figures. He's knee-high to a tall Injun and has a voice that sounds like an asthmatic fiddle.

He used to be a practising shepherd, but he got scared and sold his flocks when the cowmen declared war on the woolies. Then he purchases a lot of alleged cows, builds him a house on top of a hill, where he can see all directions, and tries to become a citizen.

Me and Dirty punches our long-eared rolling-stock in the direction of Piperock. A little farther on we finds another notice on a tree.

IT STEALS AWAY MEN'S MINDS. DOWN IT.

"Now," says Dirty, "I wonder if that means Scenery Sims."

The next one reads:

DID YOU EVER SEE TEN NIGHTS IN A BARROOM?

Me and Dirty peruses each notice careful-like and prods our jassacks along and wonders what anybody could hope to see after half that many nights in a barroom.

At the fringe of civilization we meets "Old Testament" Tilton riding a mule. The old pelican greets us, calling us "brothers," which we ain't, and then discourses thusly—

"Have you declared for or against the

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evil things of life, the same of which is the leading question in Yaller Rock County?"

"If you mean Scenery Sims, I'm against," states Dirty Shirt. "I sure am anti-Sims, now, then and after while, Testament."

"Him being incidental to the main issue, we will discuss him later," says the old sky-pilot. "Ye have heard of the wave of reformation that a few of us martyrs have stirred up hereabouts?"

"Martyrs?" asks Dirty. "What's a martyr?"

"Testament is, Dirty," says I. "Maybe Scenery is another one. Is he, Testament?"

"Yea, verily."

"Come on, Ike." Dirty slaps a burro with his hat and heads it on to the trail.

"That's a plenty. Any old time they changes s-h-e-p-h-e-r-d to spell martyr, I'm too thirsty to argue about it. Come on."

" 'Tis of thirst I would discourse," states Testament grieved-like. "Touch it not, Mr. Jones. It steals men's minds away and leads them to ruin. Strong drink is a mocker, and hooch knocketh thunder out of your stummick. Look upon it not when it is red, and—and you *hombres* better get used to drinking water, 'cause we're sure going to hang padlocks on all the grog-shops of this here county. *Sabe?*"

Me and Dirty looks at each other and then at Testament.

"Too much sun," pronounces Dirty sad-like. "Poor old preacher is done headed for the loco lodge. That's what a feller gets for riding herd on the devil in a country like this, Ike. He was a good old buggy, but he's done broke down."

"Huh!" snorts Testament. "Going dry, I tell you. Yaller Rock is going to be through with the demon rum, and then she'll start progressing like she should. It will be a glorious victory for the—the——"

"Martyrs?" I asks.

"Brother, you begin to see the light," says he.

Then me and Dirty herds our animals off down the trail, while he stands there beside his fuzzy mule, his long black coat waving in the breeze as he peers over his specs at our cavalcade. He looks a heap like a big he-buzzard up there against the sky-line.

Then we hits the road and runs into "Mighty" Jones. Mighty is driving a pinto bronc to a breaking cart, said cart being full to the top with bundles and jugs. Mighty is the only goat-herder in the State, and each and every one of them goats is a cross between a peeve and a pile-driver. Mighty got his stock from some place in the Southwest where said goats have to hold their own with cougars and grizzlies. Believe me, they ain't lost none of their belligerency.

Mighty's pinto skids to a stop as we pilgrim up, and Mighty arises up in his seat.

"It ain't noways according to the Constitution of the United States," says he, pointing to the four winds like a medicine-man. "This here is a free country, ain't she? I asks you in kind tones if it's anybody's business if I admires to drink something besides water? I asks you that, gents. All my life I've had it when I wanted it, and right now I orates wild and free that anybody who takes it away from me has got to hold a gun against my belly. I'm free, white and twenty-one—me! I asks you—is it right? I ain't thinking for a second that this here county is going to get padlocked, but just the same I'm carting home enough to kill all the snake-bites in the county. What do you fellers think? Ain't it the gol-dangdest thing you ever heard tell about? Ain't it?"

"What are you talking about, Mighty?" asks Dirty soothing-like.

Mighty sets down slow-like and looks at us with his mouth wide open.

"Talking about?" he whispers hoarse-like. "Go to ——!"

And then he slaps the pinto with his whip, and they went away on the lope.

"Well," says Dirty, punching a burro back to the straight and narrow way. "It must be a regular question, Ike."

We pilgrimed into the main street of Piperock. There don't seem to be much excitement, but you never can tell about Piperock. She's like a stick of dynamite—sort of brown and smooth looking, but, man, oh man, when you give her a jar, you sure better keep your distance and hang on to your hat.

RIGHT in front of Buck Masterson's place we meets Mrs. Wick Smith and a long, lean, pious-looking jasper, who looks like the sins of the world depressed him a heap.

Me and Dirty aims to bolster up some of our weak nerve-centers at Buck's, but they heads us off. Mrs. Smith don't ordinarily

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speak to me and Dirty, but now she acts like we're her long-lost brothers and makes us used to the Rev. Algernon Pettingill Parsley.

"The reverend is doing a good work among us," states Mrs. Smith, whose physique runs a dead heat with a bureau—minus the top.

"He looks like a good worker," admits Dirty. Then, being a hale fellow well met, "Have a little drink, Algernon?"

Algernon rears back on his heels, and I figures in my own mind that Algy needs a martingale to keep his head down.

"Oh!" snorts the lady. "The reverend is a minister."

"With the necessary failings of human beings," admits Dirty apologetic-like. "He can't no more than refuse, can he?"

"Of course," says Algernon, "you were joking, my good man."

"At' two-bits a drink—it is more finance than fooling," grins Dirty.

"Drink is a mocker," states Algy serious-like. "It wrecks——"

"So Testament said," interrupts Dirty. "What's the joke, folks?"

"Joke?" snorts Mrs. Smith. "It is no joke. The Rev. Parsley came here to volunteer his services to stamp out the demon rum. With the help of the local clergyman we hope to bring local option to this county. Strong drink has been our worst enemy, and we are going to wipe it out."

"I've done my dangdest," says Dirty reflective-like. "I've sure wiped out considerable. Has Wick quit drinking?"

"Wicksie never did drink much!" she snaps.

"Much is a peculiar word," says I, "and she covers a lot of things. For instance, a barrel of whisky per day ain't much when you consider all the distilleries work day and night."

"This ain't a question of individuals," states Algernon, peeking over his glasses at us. "We ain't working on the basis that one man is a heavier drinker than another. Your thirst and Mr. Jones' thirst——"

"Is of several months' standing," states Dirty, and he walks right away from them and goes into Buck's place.

As we came through the door, we seen Buck rise up from behind the bar and look us over. He shakes hands with us nervous-like.

"Did my eyes deceive me, Buck, or did you have a riot gun in your hands?" asks Dirty, measuring his thirst.

"Eyesight O. K.," admits Buck.

"Who for is the assassination article?" I asks.

"Scenery Sims."

"Lindhardt Cadwallader?" asks Dirty.

"Same thing," nods Buck. "Both barrels, legally and lawfully."

We accepts of Buck's compliments and rolls smokes.

"Whyfor does you admire to smear Lindhardt Cadwallader, and how so are you doing it lawfully?" inquires Dirty. "Is he deserving of demise?"

"Sure thing," says Buck earnest-like. "He's a menace. That cross between a crippled crawler and a coyote is running for sheriff on the Democratic ticket! That nasty blot on the clean pages of our county records is seeking office! That—" Buck rises half-way up the bar and hammers it with his fist—"that bandy-legged, squeaky-voiced, skinny-brained son-of-loco-eating ancestors is running as the Prohibition candidate! Prohibition,——! He pokes his nose inside my door and squeaks at me, 'Your doom is sealed!' And then he spits out in the middle of my floor and slams the door. I busts right out there and cuts one of his suspenders loose as he turns the corner.

"A six-gun ain't no good for wing shooting;

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so I loads up my shotgun. Believe me, I'll seal his doom if he pokes his nose in here again. He sends old Judge Steele down here to hold council with me, and the old Blackstone blatter orates that I've got to conduct myself in a decorous manner, 'cause there's an injunction against me. I asks him what for.

"'To keep you from assaulting Scenery Sims with a six-gun,' says he. I says, 'There ain't nothing to prevent me from spoiling his future with a shotgun, is there, Judge?' He says, 'No, there ain't no mention of shotguns.' That's how I'm within the law. Sabe?"

"Aw, you'd be safe, Buck," says Dirty. "No jury would convict you. Tell us about this demon rum argument."

"Yah!" Buck climbs plumb up on top of the bar and hammers industrious. "Demon, ——! Know what they're trying to do? They're going to try and vote this here county into a local option stage of being. Know what that means? It means that we'll have to go over into the next county or drink water when we're dry! Water!"

"To drink?" asks Dirty awed-like. "Inside your throat, Buck?"

"Uh-huh. Have to take a bath every time you get dry."

"My gosh, she's going to the dogs!" wails Dirty Shirt. "Everybody will have to ride to Powder River to get a drink or drink water. Let's go up and see what Magpie Simpkins knows about it. The sheriff ought to have some authority."

"He's quit drinking," says Buck sad-like. "He—he's backslid."

Magpie greets us sad-like. Honest to gosh, that lanky, lodge-pole person is so melancholy that his long mustache hangs on his upper lip like crape on the front door.

He gives us sort of an undertaker shake and then pulls down the curtain on the one window. He pulls up a board from the floor and produces a big demijohn. Me and Dirty looks at him wondering-like, and he shakes his head.

"Never know who's peeking in the window," he whispers.

"You're scared of what?" I asks.

"Public opinion, Ike. At this stage of the game I can't take no chance of them using my thirst as a campaign argument."

"How does Lindhardt Cadwallader Sims stand?" I asks.

"Well," says Magpie, "some think of running him for President and some favor running him out of the State. They've branded us Republicans as despoilers of homes and wreckers of men's lives. To hear some of 'em orate, you'd think it was a Republican that invented intoxication."

"And," says Dirty, "this country is so demoralized that a man like you has got to drink in private in order to defeat a cross between a bull-fiddle and a bed-bug. She's ruined, Magpie."

"Uh-huh," admits Magpie. "The praying portion is supporting Scenery. You never can tell what will happen at the election. Curlew is sort of neutral so far, but Paradise is a hotbed of corruption for the reformers. Them demon rum argufiers are sure going strong. Curlew has got one candidate—Hassayampa Harris, who is running for the legislature without no opponent, and they're betting even money that he's elected. It ain't a even money bet, because somebody will likely kill him before election."

"Why don't your side make a campaign?" asks Dirty.

"They call us the Wets, and there ain't no argument for hooch, is there? Can you think of any, Dirty?"

"Not on one drink," says Dirty; so Magpie pulled down the curtain.

Dirty leaves after a while, and I takes a walk down-town to see how things are going. Some folks never have any luck. I'm going along as free as air when I bumps right into Sally Mudgett and the Widder Sanders. Them ladies shakes my hands, which is out of the ordinary.

Miss Mudgett looks a heap like them funny pictures of Miss Democracy, and I am too good a Republican to be friendly with any such person. The widder ain't spoke to me none since I was on a coroner's jury that cleared "High-Card" Hawkins for the killing of "Slim" Sanders. We brought in a verdict of suicide, which was proper. Slim called High-Card a liar, and he reached for a gun, which was the same as if he had bit down on a dynamite cap and dared it to bust. The widder wasn't filled with revenge over that part of it, but Slim had insurance in a lodge, and there was a suicide clause in the policy.

"Oh, Uncle Ike, we're so glad to see you," warbles Miss Mudgett.

"Aren't we though," agrees the widder.

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"You're welcome," says I.

"We need stalwart men," states Miss Mudgett. "We need men of brain and brawn who are willing to die for a principle. We need men with high ideals and the courage of their convictions."

"Yes'm," says I. "It's time you both got married. I wish you luck."

"Oh, Mr. Harper," coos the widder, getting so red around the ears that I can feel the heat. Dog-gone it, she ain't so bad to look at, and I wonders what she could ever see about a careless feller like Slim was.

"You don't understand us," says Miss Mudgett. "Of course, we know that your pardner is candidate for sheriff on the rum ticket, but what is mere male friendship when the womanhood of the county appeals to you with open arms? We are going to have 'Ten Nights in a Barroom,' and we need you."

"Better get a doctor or a coroner," I advises. "Why the extended spree?"

"This is a play, Uncle Ike," states Miss Mudgett serious-like.

"Honkatonk?"

"A play," says the widder. "A play that points a moral. We are going to work up great enthusiasm. You'll help; I know you will." And she takes me by the arm like I belonged to her.

DOG-GONE it, I didn't have no excuse right then, and, by the time I figured out some good alibi, they've got me into the Mint Hall. Lindhardt Cadwallader Sims is there, and he waltzes right up to me.

"Welcome, Ike," says he. "Welcome to the fold."

"Get out, you shepherd!" I hisses in his face. "Don't talk fold to me!"

There's quite an aggregation up there. A lot of the weaker sex are setting around. Old man Thatcher and his two boys are there, and so is "Fog-Horn" Foster, who runs the biggest saloon in Powder River. Old man Thatcher leads me over into a corner, where he shakes my hand a lot. Scenery starts over toward me, but I slips my gun loose, and he leaves the hall.

"Ike," says Thatcher, "it pleases me a heap to see you here. Dog-gone me, I'm glad to get to play my orchestra before a show that ain't going to bust up in a killing. This one is going to be as safe as a church."

"I'm dry," says I. "Listening makes me dry."

He peers around to see that nobody is looking, and then he leads me outside the door and produces a pint bottle.

"Cough medicine, Ike," says he.

"You'll cough yourself to death after election if you don't change your policy," says I, handing him back the bottle.

"Meaning which?" he asks.

"Local option will close all the saloons, and we can't buy a drink."

"Is—is that what she means, Ike?"

"You dang fool, didn't you know it?" I asks, and he shakes his head.

"Nope. By mighty, I thought it meant that it was optional with you whether you drank it or not. Why, Ike, Fog-Horn Foster is boosting the campaign, and he's a big saloon man."

"In Dawson County," I admits. "In riding distance from here, Thatcher."

"My ——! He's grinding his ax!"

Just then some of them females drags us back into the hall, but I've spoiled one convert.

"Mr. Harper came along just in time," says Mrs. Tilton. "Always the Lord will provide. He has had some experience in plays, and we sure need his assistance."

Looking back over my experiences don't bring me any jolts of joy.

"Ma'am," says I, "man is full enough of natural trouble without hunting for more. I'm for peace. If Yaller Rock wishes to be temperate, *tempus fugit*. There ain't been a drouth in the Harper tribe since I can remember, and I'm——"

We hears a loud report out on the street, and a moment later Lindhardt Cadwallader Sims skids in through the open door and slams into the wall. He's got a most painful expression on his face.

"Buck Masterson!" he yelps. "He—he shot me!"

"My heavenly home!" exclaims Mrs. Tilton, and the weaker sex seems to look upon Sims as a casualty.

"You spit on his floor again?" I asks, but he don't reply.

"Set down, Mr. Sims, and tell me where you're hurt," urges Mrs. Tilton, starting for him.

Scenery slides toward the door, scared-like.

"Like ——, I will!" he squeaks and ducks outside.

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"Maybe it affected his mind!" gasps Miss Mudgett.

"Chances are," nods Fog-Horn, grinning at me. "Just to show how much I think of Scenery's brains, I'll say—chances are. Ha, ha, ha!"

When them females ain't looking, I ducks out of there and heads for Buck's place. He's setting there on the bar, looking satisfied.

"He came again," says he joyful-like. "He pokes his nose in the door and says, 'Mr. Rum Seller, it ain't going to be a year until I'll be setting in my sheriff's office across the street and watch sheep take shelter in this shack.' "

"I says, 'Lindhardt Cadwallader, you used the word set when you should have said stood.' And then I heezed a handful of number seven shot into his panties at sixty yards. If they elect that thing sheriff, I won't stay here even if the county stays wet."

Then cometh Judge Steele and Magpie Simpkins. They looks a heap sad.

"Sheriff, I reckon you've got to do it," says the judge.

"I reckon so, Judge. Buck, I've done got to arrest you."

"In favor of Scenery Sims," explains the judge.

"He called me a rum dealer," says Buck sad-like, "and then he said that inside of a year he'd set in his sheriff's office and watch sheep hive up in here. All I done was to perforate his panties with shot."

"You hadn't ought to have used a shotgun, Buck," chides the judge. "Shotguns only irritates folks and makes 'em vindictive."

"Ain't you got no rifle, Buck?" asks Magpie.

"Yeah. Dropped it the other day and knocked the front sight over so she throws to the right."

"Feller hadn't ought to let his utensils get out o' whack," states the judge. "Wouldn't 'a' had all this commotion if you'd used the proper weapon."

"Can I take my shotgun along, Judge?" asks Buck.

"Uh-huh," nods Magpie. "Give me that rifle, and I'll set that sight."

"Trade as soon as it's fixed, Sheriff," says the judge. "Scenery might come monkeying around the jail, and I believe in giving a prisoner all the protection possible."

THEN Buck asked me if I'd run his grog-shop while he's in durance vile. I don't *sabe* that side of the bar much, but I leans on the bar and acts as much like a bartender as I can.

Then I gets the shock of my young life. The back door opens slow-like and then closes softly behind the figure of Rev. Algernon Pettingill Parsley. He peers all around and then comes sneaking up to the bar.

"Brother," says he, "it pains my soul to come in thusly, but the pain in my stummick is worse than the twinges of my soul. I crave something in the nature of sody to ease the cramps of my interior. I must have relief from generated gases."

"You've got a bellyache?" I asks as he groans against the bar.

"Yea, verily. I am in torment."

I pokes around under the bar. Buck's patrons ain't addicted to gas on their stummicks, and he ain't prepared for no such an emergency. But I finds about a dozen bottles, the epitaphs of which orate them to be ginger ale. I've had cramps, and I know what I used. But I ain't never been called to minister to a minister; so I disguises the dose.

He takes a sip, another sip and then points the bottom of the glass toward the ceiling.

"If that don't unhook 'em, I'll slip you another," says I. "These are free gratis in acknowledgment of the great and noble work you are doing."

"I still feel depressed a little," says he; so I hands him another.

Pretty soon he sighs deep-like and says:

"Brother, that ginger ale was a boon and a blessing to me. I was suffering, and ye took me in. Let's have one on me."

We each had one, and I sets 'em up again.

"Brother," says he, shaking hands with me, "I am glad I am here to snatch brands from the burning. Tonight I am going to make a great speech. I am going to flay the demon rum as he has never been flayed before."

"Happy returns of the day," says I. "How's the cramps?"

He feels of his stummick, and then we has some more.

"Going to hop on to poor old alcohol, eh?" I asks.

"Ab'stively. Goin' to make a schpeech

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that will go down in hist'ry as the greatest schpeech ever made in hist'ry. What's the use of alcohol when ginger ale is so—Le's have 'nother cramp, eh?"

"Where you going?" I asks when he pulls his hat down over one eye and starts for the front door. "Remember, you're a back-door patron."

"Tha's right. Ex-coos me. I'm goin' t' shing a shong."

And I seen him kick that back door open and go out.

Ginger ale is a whole lot like a six-gun. It ain't the thing itself so much as what you put in it. I don't want anybody to chide me for what I done. I never asked him in, did I? I didn't offer to cure him. He took what I gave him.

Then Lindhardt Cadwallader Sims sticks his nose inside the front door and squints at me.

"Don't do it or say it, Scenery," says I. "I ain't under no bonds to let you live."

"Did they arrest Buck?"

"Uh-huh. Come in and set down."

"I'll come in," says he. "That's all. Did they appoint you receiver?"

"I'll get my share," says I, and then I innoculates Scenery with my new drink.

Scenery gets enthusiastic over it. Then Fog-Horn comes in and joins our temperance circle. Then old man Thatcher with his two sons and "Froggy" Deschamps, who plays the jew's-harp in Thatcher's orchestra.

They all gives that soft drink a trial and orders more. I pokes down into Buck's cellar and finds another case of the same thing. Later on somebody knocked on the door.

Can you imagine anybody knocking on a saloon door? Nobody but Algernon would have done it. He shuts one eye and peers at us.

"Brother," says he, "would it be possible for me to purchase a container of that ginger ale? I feel a recurrence of the cramps."

"Welcome to our glorious land, Reverend," yelps Fog-Horn. "Come right inside."

"Yes," says Scenery. "Come in and set. This is a meeting of the faithful, and this place is no longer a den of vice. You can set here without casting a stain."

"That's good," says Algernon, and I adds another glass to my tray.

"Day after tomorrow we casts our votes," states Scenery. "Day after tomorrow. In the course of human e-vents it has become necessary to e-vict the juice that joggles; having said so, I'll——"

"Going to be some play," interrupts Fog-Horn. " 'Ten Nights in a Barroom' all in one short evening. First we has a speech by the Reverend Algernon Pettingill Parsley, interrupted by Old Testament Tilton——"

"Introduced," corrects Scenery.

"That's at first," admits Fog-Horn. "Then we have a speech by our next sheriff and maybe a discourse by Hassayampa Harris, who will be Honorable Hassayampa Harris if the people ain't lied to him. Some program, eh?"

"If we can carry Paradise, we've got a cinch," states Scenery.

"If that's the place you're scared of, that's the place to fight 'em," says I. "Make a campaign in the enemy country."

"Paradish might be a schtumbling sus-stone," gulps Algernon wise-like.

"Let's go to Paradise and campaign a little," says I.

"With music," gurgles old man Thatcher. "Let's go and have mass meeting. Go there and split the enemy's bulwarks. What shay?"

"A little child shall lead them," says Algernon.

"Plenty for some," says I, "but I reckon you're going to need two grownups and a cane, old-timer."

Sure, I went along. We found a hayrack half full of straw; somebody got a team, and we went campaigning.

The Thatcher family took along their musical utensils, Scenery took along a speech that somebody wrote for him, and I took along the ginger ale and a couple of guns.

We gave three cheers as we went past the jail, and a little later I picked three shot out of my shoulder. I reckon that Magpie hadn't got that rifle fixed yet. I don't know what time we got to Paradise. I remember that we stopped the team once to let Scenery make a speech. He got up on the seat to read it.

I reckon I held the light too low for him to see, 'cause he yells—

"Get up!"

Of course them broncs started, and Scenery fell off. We didn't stop for him,

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'cause nobody had hold of the lines, and we hit the high spots until we ran into a hitch-rack at Paradise.

"She's wan gran' speech," declared Froggy." "Wan gran' cli-max, eh?"

Then what couldn't climb out fell out. It must 'a' been midnight. I fired a couple of shots into the air to sort of announce our arrival, but there ain't even a light in the saloon.

Then we went over to the sidewalk; all sat down in a row, and the orchestra busts into being. Thatcher's orchestra is some musical bunch, if you asks me. The old man plays the bull-fiddle; one son plays a squeeze-organ; the other one plays a mouth-harp and Froggy Deschamps plays a jew's-harp.

They'd play a lot better if they'd come to some understanding as to what tune they're going to attempt before they start.

It don't do an orchestra any good when each member plays his favorite tune regardless of anybody else. "Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep" on a bull-fiddle don't harmonize with "Sweet Adeline" on a jew's-harp, with a mouth-harp playing "Stars and Stripes Forever" and a squeeze-organ yelping "Turkey in the Straw" between times.

It sort of confuses your ears until you can't tell right from wrong. Under them conditions any man what decides against murder is a danged hypocrit.

WHEN it was over, we gave three cheers. I don't know what for, unless it was because the music had ceased. Anyway, we cheered, and then the Rev. Parsley offers to recite, "Lips that Touch Liquor."

We debated the question.

"All in favor say 'aye,' " says Fog-Horn.

"Aye!" yelps everybody.

"Contrary 'no,' " says Fog-Horn.

"No!" everybody yelps.

"Well," says Fog-Horn, "under them conditions, Parson, you better go ahead and keep your mouth shut."

Just then a squeaky voice says—

"What gosh-danged fool started that team?"

And Scenery staggers into our midst.

"You done it yourself," states Fog-Horn.

"Did I?" he squeaks. "I ought to be shot! Lit on a rock and knocked all my front teeth out. Make a fine-looking sheriff."

"Was you aiming to bite your prisoners?" I asks, and just then Bill McFee, the marshal of Paradise, enters our midst.

"What seems to be the trouble?" asks Bill.

"Thish is a campaign meeting," states Scenery with sort of a lisp. "We've come down here to show you pelicans of Paradise what's what and which. Is everybody dead around here."

"Huh, you ought to have a hall," says Bill pleasant-like. "Out here ain't no place for campaigning. Lacks dignity and disturbs the peace."

"That's wise advice," nods Fog-Horn. "Let's have some more ginger ale and then hire a hall."

"Whoo-e-e-e!" says I and empties both guns in the air.

"Come on," says Bill. "I've got the best place in town."

I don't know where he led us, but I know we went inside a house. I heard Froggy groaning a waltz on his jew's-harp, and then I hears a strange voice yelp:

"Shut up, you cross between a dying calf and a tight wire in the wind and let an honest horse-thief sleep! What did they put you in for—thinking you could play that grunt-organ?"

"Well," says I to me, "I sure am busting up the local option machinery. In one day I got the prohibitionists drunk, got 'em throwed in jail and also knocked all the prospective sheriff's front teeth out."

Then I went to sleep.

They let us out the next morning. It wasn't a private affair, if you asks me. Paradise stood around in bunches and gazed upon our shame.

"Giving them old jails a looking over, Scenery?" yells Ricky Henderson, and just then Old Testament breaks out of the main herd and lopes up to Algernon.

"Brother martyr," he sobs, putting his arm around Algy's shoulders, "did they jail you for your attitude?"

The reverend spits sort of difficult-like, makes up a face and says—

"You might say it was."

"You didn't weaken, brother?" asks Old Testament pleading-like. "You will still fight tooth and nail? Fight the good fight for us against rum?"

"Yup," nods Algy, "and I'll say a few things against ginger ale."

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"Ginger ale?" asks Testament. "We often have it in our home."

"Then don't ask me up. Strong drink may be a mocker, but ginger ale is a trail blazer to tremens."

"You folks can go home," says Bill McFee. "I done you a kindness, 'cause somebody might 'a' shot at you."

"Kindness!" snaps Old Testament, bowing his neck at Bill. "I'd admire to let you know that it was no kindness, sir! The Rev. Algernon Pettingill Parsley has donated his services to fight the booze of the county."

"Yeah, I know," says Bill weary-like. "I had to drag him the last fifty yards, Testament."

It wasn't no merry company that went back to Piperock. Scenery showed me the rock he fell upon; so I stopped the team, got out and picked it up. A rock like that deserves something better than just laying beside a road. Magpie is home when I got there. He sizes me up and then grins.

"Lot of women been looking for you, Ike. Good thing they didn't see you, 'cause you sure look like ——!"

"I've done a lot for you, Magpie," says I, "and I don't need chiding. Them women are going to help me play 'Ten Nights in a Barroom.' *Sabe?*"

"Have you been to rehearsal, Ike?"

"Less than that," says I. "I've been to jail."

Then I flopped down to get a little sleep.

There's a paper published in Paradise. It comes out every time the editor can get paper enough to print it on. He must 'a' had a streak of luck, because Magpie wakes me up and hands me an edition. I looks her over and then looks at Magpie.

"You done real well, Ike," says he mean-like.

Across the top of the sheet in big letters is the following:

AIN'T EVEN SAFE FOR PREACHERS

Piperock saloon puts up job on sick minister. Spikes ginger ale for prohibitionists. Harrowing Details as follows.

And then it goes on to tell about how the tough element took advantage of the innocent and got 'em throwed into jail. I ain't mentioned in the first part, but later it remarks about the play in Piperock and says:

Ike Harper, a reformed drunkard, will play the part of the Horrible Example. As Mr. Harper has lived the life he will depict, the audience will be moved to tears. Mr. Harper, before his conversion, was intimately connected with Magpie Simpkins, the liquor interests' candidate for sheriff.

I read the last part out loud, and then I looks up at Magpie, who is taking off his vest and rolling up his sleeves.

"They'll be moved to tears if they see you pretty soon," says he. "They may use you as a horrible example, Mr. Harper, but I get first chance."

What could I do? I tried to explain, but you can't explain nothing to a man who hits you on the jaw every time you open your mouth; so I decides to lick him first and talk later.

Me and him sure kept house. We took pardners for a waltz and wasn't careful what we stepped on. I got him down once. He bumped my head on the floor and then got off to get a stick of wood to hit me with, and I got up. Then we took pardners for a square dance.

"Salute your pardners!" says I and swung at his jaw.

I reckon I must 'a' missed. The next thing I know I skidded across the room, hits my head on our dry-goods-box cupboard, and the whole thing came down upon me. I don't know how long I played *Old Mother Hubbard*, but I do know that, when I gets back to the point where things annoy me, I finds that I've got a mixed taste of sody, baking-powder, vinegar and molasses syrup in my mouth, and later on I finds my face and hair veneered with the mixture. I dumps the big box to one side and crawls out.

"My ——!" snorts a voice at the door. "You gobby critter!"

I pries one of my eyes open and squints at Dirty Shirt.

"How goeth the great fight, Ike?" he asks.

"Well," says I, clawing some of the hot-cake ingredients out of my hair, "you can see my attitude so far, Dirty."

"Hey, Ike!" says a voice at the door. "Where is my key?"

There stands Buck in the doorway.

"You ain't done right by closing me up ahead of things."

I'm hunting in my pockets when another figure darkens the door, and a voice squeaks—

"Ike, they want you down at the hall."

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Scenery Sims stumbles inside.

I hands Buck his key, and Scenery stares at him.

"You out again?" he squeaks. "You out on bail?"

"Not guilty," grunts Buck. "Soaked me five for criminal negligence. Said I ought to 'a' used a rifle."

And then he steps between Scenery and the door.

"Don't you touch me, Buck!" squeaked Scenery. "I'm a pizen pelican when I'm peeved, and you're making me rile all over."

"You said you'd herd sheep in my place," says Buck. "You said that, dang your hide!"

Scenery tries to run past Buck, but he didn't make it. Buck got him by the back of his neck and the slack of his pants and cast him out. Scenery skids along on his hands and knees and then crawls to his feet.

"I said it!" he yelps, shaking his fist at Buck. "You're going to find out that you've done assaulted one of our prominent citizens, dang you! What I said about them sheep goes double now, and you'll likely be herding them yourself."

The last me and Dirty seen of that pair, Scenery was still in the lead but Buck was running a close second, and in Buck's hands is the remains of that can of molasses syrup.

THEN comes "Polecat" Perkins. Polecat is our most odoriferous citizen. He only comes to town to vote or get his keg filled. He hives up in a dug-out in the hills and raises skunks for their fur. He stumbles into the door and peers at me and Dirty.

"Haw!" says he, working his jaws. "Everybody gone loco around here, Ike? I comes down to see about election and finds that our liberty is in jeopardy. I feels that us strong citizens has got to do something."

"Strong is the right word," says Dirty, opening the window.

"They asks me to the show this evening," continues Polecat. "Testament Tilton asks me to come and join in their song of thanksgiving over what is going to happen to hooch. I'm here on business, but I don't miss any singing. What are they trying to cause this country to do, gents?"

"Polecat," says Dirty, "this country is almost in the hands of a receiver. Us old-timers will have to make moonshine or drink milk. *Sabe?* While there is yet time, I will buy a drink."

"I'll sing my song of thanksgiving right now," grins Polecat, and the two of them walks down-town.

I scrubs for about an hour to get some of the larder out of my hair, and then I pilgrims down-town, where I meets Wick Smith, waving his arms and talking to himself like a shepherd.

"Better hire out as a windmill, Wick," I advises.

"Hire, ——!" he roars. "Listen to this, Ike. The law, as interpreted by Magpie Simpkins, has grabbed half the chairs from the Mint Hall and has moved 'em over to Buck's place, where the disciples of the demon rum opine to have a rally this night. We've got a regular show and only half enough chairs to set upon.

"Things is in an awful state. Buck Masterson has gummed Scenery all up with molasses. When I comes down, Polecat Perkins is down behind a wagon-box, exchanging lead with Pete Gonyer, who has sided in with us. Magpie got sympathetic with Scenery and tells Scenery that lye will take the syrup out of his hair, but he didn't tell Scenery what else it would take, and now Scenery is making medicine against Magpie for scalping him. Your sympathy is still with us, ain't it, Ike?"

"I ain't got none to waste, Wick, 'cause I need it all for Ike Harper," says I, and then I went back to the cabin.

As soon as it gets dark, I girds my hips with a pair of guns and walks down the middle of the road. I've got a feeling that I ought to stay at home, but I never did have sense enough to foller a good hunch.

Buck's place is all lighted up, and so is the Mint Hall. I stops and tries to figure out which side to support, when all at once a pane of glass right beside my head gets shattered, and I sees the flash of a gun over by the saloon.

I want you to understand that I didn't go into the Mint Hall because my sympathies was with the local optionists but because it was the first place I could duck into. Old Testament meets me at the door and shakes me by the hand.

"Brother," says he, "I felt that you'd show up. Where is your ticket?"

"Ticket to where?" I asks. "Are you the conductor?"

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"Ticket to the show, Ike. Ticket or a dollar."

"Ike comes in free, Testament," states Fog-Horn over Testament's shoulder. "Ike's a actor in the play."

I'd let a man call me most anything to save me a dollar; so I follers Fog-Horn. All the remaining seats are taken, and some folks are standing along the walls. I sees "Yuma" Yates and "Big Foot" Forrest setting down in front. I don't like them *hombres*. I hates to be a actor in front of two unnecessary evils like them, but I figure I've got an even break, being as I know where they are.

Fog-Horn leads me up behind the curtain, where there's a lot of females milling around. They've got a home-made bar up there and a lot of empty bottles and kegs, which makes it look like a real saloon to anybody who ain't never seen one.

Setting on a box on one side of the platform is Polecat Perkins, and he appears too drunk to move. Polecat ain't what you'd call fastidious as to fashions, and he sure is a sight for to see.

"How comes Polecat to be a actor?" I asks.

"He offered his services to us, and we can't refuse," says the Widder Sanders. "We are going to use him as an example of what liquor can do to a human being."

"What am I supposed to be in this here theater?" I asks.

"You are to be," says Miss Mudgett embarrassed-like, "you—Uncle Ike, I hope you won't feel offended, but we had to have somebody play the part of the bartender, and we thought you—you might be willing to do it."

"You won't have to handle any real liquor," states Mrs. Tilton. All you will have to do is to stand over there behind the bar and just serve the drinks as they are asked for. You won't have no talking to do."

"Brought m' own box 'long," mumbles Polecat foolish-like. "Hear there ain't seats 'nough, and I brings m' own. Yessir. When do we drink again?"

Just then the orchestra starts out in front, and I loosens up both of my guns. Some female starts wailing about Scenery not being there to play his part, but that didn't bother me. When I went over to stand behind that bar, I'm praying that the light will be good enough so I can kill Froggy Deschamps. A jew's-harp is bad enough as a musical instrument, but when a fellow like Froggy gets one between his teeth, it gets plumb out of the realm of music and enters the category of such things as ulcerated teeth or earache.

THEM females gets real busy placing the actors to suit the play, and, when the curtain goes up, we're ready for anything. On each side, out of sight, is females with books, who are supposed to tell us actors what to say in case we slip off the trail. I'm behind the bar, wiping a glass. Old Judge Steele is standing at the bar with his tall hat on his head and is facing Pete Gonyer and the Rev. Algernon Pettingill Parsley. Setting on his box on the other side of the room is Polecat, snoring plentiful.

I hear somebody snicker out in front as the judge lays his tall hat on the bar.

"Ten years ago," orates the judge, "I had two manly sons. Where are they now?"

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" whoops Yuma. "Ten year ago, eh? And you never got married?"

I takes out both guns and lays 'em on the bar.

"Where are they now?" says the judge sad-like. "Where are they now?"

"Did you search the sheep camps, Judge?" yells Big Foot, and the pair of them hugs each other.

"Just a minute, folks," says Testament, climbing up on the stage. "Bretheren, this here is a moral play and ain't produced to be laughed at. *Sabe?* We're here to hammer home a moral, and we're going to do it if we has to use powder. The next person who yells out loud is going to need help. Lead us not into temptation."

Old Testament sets down on a corner of the stage, facing the audience.

"Who is safe in this place?" continues the judge. "Not mine nor yours."

"Not ours," says Yuma soft-like, peering up at Testament.

"Shall I go on?" questions the judge. "Shall I call up and pass in review before you, one after another, all the—the—the——"

"Wretched victims, Judge," says the widder, reading in the book.

"All the vetched wrictims—er—vretched wictims—uh—who have fallen in review

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during the last ten years in Piperock? Do I need to?"

"Not on our account, Judge," says Big Foot. "We remember 'em. Some fell, but the most of 'em had to be cut down. Go ahead."

"But what is the root of all this evil?" yelps the judge. "Is there no remedy?"

"Keeley!" yelped Yuma, and just then old Sam Holt comes on to the stage.

He's got on his Sunday clothes.

"Howdy, Mr. Slade," says the judge. "How's every little thing?"

"Tol'able, Judge."

Then he turns to Pete.

"Howdy, son Frank. Dog-gone your hide, you've been drinking again!"

"Uh-huh," admits Pete. "Sure have, pa, and I'm going to drink some more, too. Hand me a scoop of brandy, bartender."

I handed him a bottle, and just then old Sam grabs him by the wrist.

"Let go that bottle!" yelps Pete.

"Put up that hooch, my son," says the old man. "You're drunk."

"Let go that bottle!" yelps Pete. "Let go, or I'll ride you around the place and slap you with my hat. Let go, you darn old pelican!"

He gave old Sam a shove, and the old man lit setting down.

"Get up and rush him!" hisses Mrs. Tilton. "He's supposed to kill you."

"Look out," warns Pete. "I'll bust you one!"

Pete's left-handed, and he waves that bottle around his head, but old Sam kept right on coming.

Ker-bam!

It might 'a' killed old Sam if it had hit him, but it didn't—it hit Polecat Perkins right in the head.

Polecat shudders all over, sets up as straight as a string and folds his hands.

"Frank Slade, you have murdered your father," states the judge solemn-like.

Everything is still for a moment, and then I hears Yuma:

"Moral, ——! One man ain't never been married and has two boys, and another boy has two fathers. Let's go home, Big Foot. This is awful."

"Shoot yourself, Pete!" whistles the widder. "You're supposed to commit suicide."

"Into the floor," whispers old Sam.

Pete pulls his gun quick-like, and I reckon it went off accidental, 'cause it tore a corner out of Polecat's box. Pete lets out a dying yelp, slips when he tries to fall easy and knocks that home-made bar right over on top of me. Pete weighs close to two hundred.

Then I rises up above the wreck and looks around. Polecat gets up like a man in a dream, picks up that box, holds it above his head for a moment and then crashes it down in the middle of the stage, where it busts wide open.

"Kitty, kitty, kitty," I hears somebody in the audience call, and then our show begins to fade out.

I seen the suicide hop off the floor and sail right out over the orchestra. Then I seen the Widder Sanders and Mrs. Tilton foller him out. I didn't want to cross the stage; so I ducks the other way, throws a chair through a window and follers the chair. I lit on top of Wick Smith's store porch and slid off into the street. Folks are running out of the hall. I pilgrims across to Buck's place.

Seems to be quite a meeting there. Magpie is standing on a card-table. All them chairs from the Mint Hall are occupied, and the place is foggy with smoke. Standing on another table is Hassayampa Harris, and on the bar sets Buck with a shotgun across his lap.

Old Testament and the Rev. Parsley seem to have arrived ahead of me, and there appears to be a lull in the meeting.

"Just about what are you fellers doing here?" asks Buck, patting his gun.

"You—you jobbed our show!" whoops Testament, waving his arms. "You hired Polecat Perkins to skunk up our play!"

"That's a lie," states a tired voice behind me, and there stands Polecat, shaking at the knees. "That's a lie," he repeats. "Goin' to ship 'em to Helena. Perfec'ly harmless. Who hit me in the—the——"

And Polecat sprawls out full length on the floor.

"Must 'a' been a pleasant place across the street," observes Magpie. "If they can't win by majority, they opines to win by mortality, I reckon."

I felt sorry for Polecat. I leans over and turns him on his back.

"Ba-a-a-a!"

Rip-p-p, rip-p-p-p!

Something seems to hit me in the rear, and I come back to earth on my shoulders.

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I seen the Rev. Parsley do a flipflop, and I seen Old Testament plumb off the floor, reaching back like he was searching for something.

I hears the crash of Buck's shotgun, and many feet seem to go over me and on me. It all seems like sort of a dream to me. I seemed to sort of get up on my hands and knees, and then I gets invigorated in the hip pockets. I skidded under the pool-table on my hands and knees, went out the other side and got hammered right back again. I can't see very well, on account of having hit the bridge of my nose on a chair.

Then there seems to come a lull in the confusion, and I peers out. Buck is setting there in the middle of the floor with his shotgun in his hands and a fool look on his face, and standing there facing him is Lindhardt Cadwallader Sims. They glares at each other for a moment, and then:

"I told you I'd do it," proclaims Scenery at the top of his voice. "Didn't I tell you I would? I couldn't find any sheep; so I borrowed half of Mighty's goats. Same thing, ain't they? Any old time you insults one of our prominent citizens——"

While I listens to Scenery's oration of hate, I sees an animated bock beer sign tiptoe into the front door, and, as Scenery leans forward to hammer home his war talk, the goat accepts the invite.

Scenery turned over in the air and landed between the rail and the bar, where he stands on his head for a few seconds before he slips down. The goat shakes his head at Buck, but Buck don't show fight; so it wanders out of the door just as the Rev. Algernon starts to come in.

Algy don't know goats. He makes a dive at this one and gets his knees knocked higher than his head. He crashes down in a heap and sings off key—

"I held four aces, which is quite a lot,
But his Colt had me topped and took the pot,
With a hiyi and a hiyi and a hiyi yippi-i-a!"

"You ain't always been a preacher," says I, and just then Scenery slides loose and turns his feet around so he can face Buck.

"You're going to get the worst of it," says he, starting in right where he left off.

Buck raises his shotgun to cover Scenery. They glares at each other for a minute, and then—*click-click* goes both hammers of the shotgun.

"I—I told you I'd kill you," mutters Buck.

Scenery nods and seems to sink lower.

"Man of your word, Buck," says he slow-like. "Good-by."

"Take care of yourself," says Buck foolish-like.

I got up and walked out of the door. I'm sick of the whole campaign. I'm so sprained in my hips that I walk in circles, and out in the moonlight I finds Dirty Shirt.

HE'S on his hands and knees in the dirt and has got both arms around the neck of a goat.

"Dirty Shirt," says I, "you're either drunk or loco."

"Nothing like it, Ike," he replied. "I'm playing safe. *Sabe?* Can't fool me no more. I let loose twice, and now I'm numb from my belt on down. Hold the danged thing while I get up, will you?"

I took the goat by the neck while Dirty gets up painful-like, and then he limps away down the street, leaving me there holding the goat. I takes a good grip on its neck, gives its head a twist and kicks its legs out from under it at the same time.

That's the way to humble a goat. It gets all befuzzled over such procedure. Of course, you want to go away from there as fast as you can—which I didn't do. I stumbled and fell on my hands and knees when I started to run.

That goat wasn't particular. Every time I tried to get up it moved me on down the street, and, when I sat up, it butted me in the neck. After a while I laid down flat, and the goat pulled out.

Then I sure cut some circles down that street. I reckon that goat busted my rudder, 'cause I sure made a curved trail.

"Oh, Uncle Ike, I'm so sorry!" exclaims a voice beside me, and here is the Widder Sanders and Miss Mudgett. "You were doing wonderfully, and we want to thank you."

"Yes'm," says I, "I done wonderfully."

"I—I only wish we had the chance to show what we could have done," says the widder sad-like. "It was over so suddenly."

"Maybe it looked that way to you," says I, rubbing myself. "You're welcome

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to show what you can do, ladies, but don't ask me to look on. That goat is still alive, but, if you takes my advice, you'll go right home. *Sabe?*"

Then I weaved on. I found Dirty Shirt out in the corral putting a pack on his burro. I didn't ask no questions. I packed mine and got my rifle, and we piked away in the night. Me and Dirty seemed to limp a heap. We came to them proclamations on the trees, and we stopped to spell 'em out again without comment. We made camp about morning and slept all day. We're too sore to go on; so we lays there until the kinks go out of our muscles. Then we packs up, looks at each other and then off at the blue haze of the hills.

"Might take a peek at Powder River," suggests Dirty.

"Might," I agrees, and we swings our jassacks north.

Later on we pilgrims down the one street of Powder River, ties our burros in front of Fog-Horn's saloon and went inside.

"Brothers, will you have plain spirits or ginger ale?" asks a familiar voice behind the bar.

Me and Dirty looks at him and at each other. It is Algernon Pettingill Parsley. He's got a black eye, and, when he moves, he sort of squeaks in the joints.

"You?" asks Dirty foolish-like.

"Uh-huh—me," says Algy. "Never again do I help prohibition. If that's what happens to clergymen in Piperock, what would happen to an honest-to-gosh sinner?

"I've been an actor," says he, leaning on the bar and grinning at us, "and Fog-Horn hankered for prohibition in Yaller Rock. You see, gents, if it's dry over there, it makes big business over here. *Sabe?* All they needed over there was some one to lead 'em. I'm all through, though. Any time they brings goats, I'm all through."

"Uh-huh," says I. "Me, too."

Just then Fog-Horn drifts into the place and dumps his saddle on the table. He looks like he'd had a hard year.

"How did the e-lection go?" asks Dirty, wondering-like.

"She's an issue, gents," says Fog-Horn. "Won by one single vote."

"What is a issue?" I asks.

"Local option, Ike. They'll decide it at the regular election in November."

"Uh—who was elected sheriff?" asks Dirty.

"Nobody was elected," says Fog-Horn. "Magpie and Scenery both got nominated, 'cause nobody ran against 'em. It wasn't no fight."

"It—it wasn't n-no fight?" stutters Dirty. "Say it wasn't?"

"Nope. The real fight will be in November. Don't you snake-hunters know anything about elections?"

Me and Dirty looks at each other and then shakes our heads.

"Well," says Fog-Horn, "this is the first year they uses the direct primaries, which is a heap like the regular election, and——"

But me and Dirty Shirt didn't wait to hear the rest. We untied our animals and poked 'em off up the street.

"The Rev. Algernon Pettingill Parsley wasn't no regular preacher," states Dirty Shirt like he was telling me something.

"Won by one vote, Dirty Shirt, and we had two," says I, "but it wasn't no regular election. It's a issue."

"The real fight will be in November. Ike. We can go quite a ways before November."

"Yes," says I, slapping a burro so it will show more speed. "Yes, and it won't be in no circle, either, Dirty Shirt."

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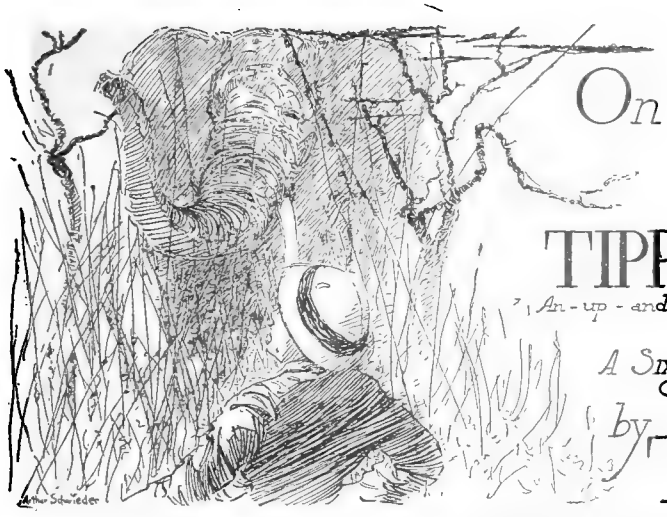

On the TRAIL of TIPPOO TIB

An-up-and-down-the-Earth Tale

A Six-Part Story
CONCLUSION

by Talbot Mundy

Author of "Heinie Horns Into the Game," "The End of the Bad Ship Bundesrath," *etc.*

THE BAGANDA, from being a nuisance, became a joke. When it dawned on his fat intellect that we were hurrying toward Schillingschen with only one rifle among us and no baggage at all, he jumped at once to the conclusion we must be Schillingschen's friends, and his fear that we intended to hand him over to that ruthless brute for summary punishment was more melting to his back-bone than the dread of our imaginary whip that had caused him to give Schillingschen away.

He tried to bite through the thongs that held him, but Will twisted for him handcuffs out of thick iron wire that we bagged from a chief, who had intended to make ornaments with it for his own legs. We did not dare let the man escape nor care to prevent our men from using force when he threw himself on the ground and wept like a spoiled child.

"I will tell you," he said at last, deciding he might as well be hanged for mutton as for lamb, "what Bwana Schillingschen is searching for. I will tell you who knows where to find it. I will tell you where to find the man who knows. Only let me run away then to my own home in Uganda, and I will never again leave it. I am afraid! I am afraid!"

But that was only one more reason for keeping him with us and no ground at all for delay. He would not tell unless we loosed his hands first; so we pressed on, camping late and starting early, until about noon of the fourth day we caught sight of Schillingschen's tents in the distance and gathered our party at once into a little rocky hollow to discuss the situation.

Behind us the land sloped gradually for thirty or forty miles toward a sharp escarpment that overlooked the level land beside the lake. At times between the hills and trees we could glimpse Nyanza itself, looking like the vast rim of forever, mysterious and calm. In front of us the rolling hills, broken out here and there into rocky knolls, piled up on one another toward the hump of Elgon, on which the blue sky rested.

In every direction were villages, of folk who knew so little of white men that they paid no taxes yet and did no work—marrying and giving in marriage—fighting and running away—eating and drinking and watching their women till the corn and beans and sweet potatoes—without as much as foreboding of the taxes, work for wages, missionaries, law and commerce soon to come.

Schillingschen was more than taking his time, he was dawdling, keeping his donkeys fat and letting his men wander at pleasure to right and left gathering reports for him of unusual folk or things. We came very close to being seen by one of them, who emerged from a village near us with a pair of chickens he had foraged, followed by the owner of the luckless birds in a great hurry and fury to get paid for them.

Schillingschen's tent could fairly easily be stalked from the far side in broad daylight,

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and I was for making the attempt. There was the risk that one of our porters might grow restless and break bounds if we waited, or that the Baganda might take to yelling. We gagged him as soon as I talked of the danger of that.

Coutlass and Brown, however, were the only two who would agree with me. Like me they were weary to death of *mtama* porridge, with or without milk, and the sight of Schillingschen's distant camp-fire with a great pot resting on stones in the midst of it, whetted appetite for white man's food. They and I were for supping as soon as possible from the German's provender and sleeping under his canvas roof.

But Fred and Will insisted on caution, claiming reasonably that surprize would be infinitely easier after dark. It was unlikely that Schillingschen would post any sentries and not much matter if he did. His knowledge of natives and natural air of authority made him quite safe among any but the wildest, and these were a comparatively peaceful folk. In all probability he would sit and read by candlelight, with his boys all snoring a hundred yards away.

There was no making Fred and Will see the virtue of my contention that a sudden attack while his boys were scattered all about among the villages would be just as likely to succeed; so we settled down to wait where we were with what patience we could summon.

It was a miserable, hungry business, under a blazing hot sky, packed tightly together among men who objected to our smell as strongly as we to theirs. It is the fixed opinion of all black people that the white man smells like "bad water," and no word seems discoverable that will quite return the compliment. That afternoon was reminiscent of the long days on the *dhow*, when nobody could move without disturbing everybody else and we all breathed the same hot mixed stench over and over.

We posted two sentries to lie with their eyes on the level of the rim and guard against surprize. But there was so little to watch, except kites wheeling overhead everlastingly, that they went to sleep, and we were so bored and so sure of our hiding-place and Schillingschen's unsuspicion that we did not notice it. I myself fell asleep toward five o'clock, and, when I awoke, the sun was so low in the west that our hollow lay in deep gloom.

Fred was lying on his elbow, sucking an unfilled, unlighted pipe. Will lay on his side, too, with back toward both of us, ruminating. Coutlass and Brown were both asleep, but Coutlass awoke as I rolled over and struck him with my heel. Nearly all the porters were snoring.

It was a sharp exclamation from the Greek that caused me to sit up and face due westward. The others lay as they were. It was gloom in our hollow—the velvety shadows in which we lay with granite boulders scattered between us—and no alertness on our part that saved that day, although Coutlass acted instantly and creditably, once awake.

SCHILLINGSCHEN stood there looking down on us, with his feet planted squarely on the rim of the hollow, and a Mauser rifle under one arm. His great splay beard flowed sideways in the evening wind. One hand he held over his eyes, trying to make out details in the dark. The only consolation was that he was as stupid as we were.

He stood with his back to the setting-sun, exposing himself without any thought of the risk he ran, his huge, filled-out head refusing stubbornly to take in the truth of what had happened. Once convinced, the Prussian mind is not readily unconvinced. He had assured himself long ago that our party was at the bottom of Victoria Nyanza.

The second he did make out details, he was swift to act, but that was already too late, although he did not know it at the moment. He threw up his rifle and laughed—a great, deep guffaw from the stomach that awoke every one.

"So, so!" he gloated. "So Mr. Oakes and his fellow escaped convicts are alive, after all! Ha-ha-ho-ho! So you followed me all this way, only to forget that kites are curious! A fine comfortless journey you must have had, too! There were twenty kites wheeling over you. I counted and wondered. Curiosity drove me to come and see. The first man who moves a finger, Mr. Oakes, will die that instant. Let your rifle lie where it is!"

It would be no use pretending the man had not courage, at all events of the sort that glories in the upper hand of a fight.

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He chuckled and reveled in our predicament, taking in, now that his eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness of our hollow, the utter lack of comforts or provisions and enjoying our disappointment. He certainly knew himself master of the situation.

"I suspect you have a man of mine down there with you," he announced presently. "Is that not my Baganda? Is he gagged? Is he bound? Loose him, Mr. Oakes, at once! I say at once! Otherwise you die now."

He pointed his rifle directly at Fred and the next second fired it—but not intentionally. Coutlass sprang from behind him, having crawled out through a shadow, and hit him so hard with a stone on the back of the skull that he loosed off the rifle and pitched head-foremost down among us. The Greek promptly jumped on top of him with a yell like a maniac's, failing to land with both heels on his back-bone by nothing but luck. As it was, he lost balance and sat down so hard on Schillingschen's head that there was no need of the energy with which we all followed suit, piling all over him to pin him down, like hounds that have rotted their quarry over.

The German was stunned—knocked into utter oblivion—breathing like a sleeping drunkard and bleeding freely from the nose. Coutlass jumped off him and began to execute a war-dance up and down, yelling like a madman until Fred threatened him with the rifle and Will gagged him from behind.

"Do you want his armed men down on us, you ass?"

"Gassharramminy!" he laughed. "By ——, I forgot them! Let us go and eat their supper!"

He spoke as a man who had full right now to be considered a member in good standing. We all noticed it and exchanged glances, but that was no time for argument about men's rights.

Brown was already over the rim of the hollow and making in the direction of the tents. We called him back and compelled him to stay on guard over the prisoners, to his awful disgust, for he suspected there was whisky among Schillingschen's "chop" boxes. But so did we! We left all our boys with him except Kazimoto, threatening them with hitherto unheard of penalties if they dared as much as show a lock of hair above the rim of the hollow while we were gone.

Then the rest of us, with Fred leading and Kazimoto last of all, crept out and sought the lowest level along which to reach the camp. Will had taken Schillingschen's rifle and went next after Fred. Coutlass followed so close on my heels that more than once he trod on them, and once so nearly tripped me that Fred called a halt behind some bushes and cursed me for clumsiness.

But it turned out to be easy hunting. The ten boys had tied the donkeys up to a rope in line and sat crooning while their supper cooked at a long, bright fire. We came up to Schillingschen's tent from behind, crept round the side of it and in a moment had three more good weapons, I taking the big-bore elephant-gun that had dealt with us so savagely on the lake, Coutlass seizing another Mauser, and Kazimoto adopting the shotgun.

The rest was child's play. We marched out of the tent all abreast and called on the ten boys to surrender, making them put up their hands until Coutlass had found their five rifles and ammunition. They were too astonished even to ask questions. Accustomed to Schillingschen's despotic orders, they obeyed ours silently, showing no symptoms of trying to bolt, having nowhere to bolt to. But we took precautions.

Kazimoto ran back to bring our party, and we took a coil of iron wire from Schillingschen's trade goods and fastened every prisoner's hands firmly behind his back, including the unconscious German's. That done, we ate the meat, beans and vegetable supper that the ten had cooked.

Brown and Coutlass found Schillingschen's whisky after that, and under its influence again swore ceaseless friendship beneath the noncommittal stars. While they feasted, we took Coutlass' rifle away as a plain precaution.

XIV

When the devil's at bay,
Ye may kneel down and pray
For a year and a day
To be spared the distress of dispatching him;
But the longer ye kneel
The more squeamish ye'll feel,
'Cause the louder he'll squeal,
And at brotherly talk there's no matching him.
Discussion's his aim,
And as sure as you're game
To give heed to the same,

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You regarding extremes with compunction,
You may bet he'll requite
Your compassion with spite,
Knifing you in the night
With much *pro bono publico* unction.
Parcere Subjectis?

THAT night we reveled in luxury, for, after the life we had led recently, it took time to reaccustom any of us to the common comforts. Schillingschen traveled with every provision for his carcass and his belly, and we plundered him.

For a while we expected to have trouble with Coutlass. We gave Brown a rifle and distributed the other Mausers among Kazimoto and our best boys, but we did not dare trust the Greek with a weapon he might use against us, and he resented that bitterly. He had an answer to Fred's subterfuge that as a white man he would need a license before daring to carry firearms.

"I dare do anything. I care nothing for law!" he answered, and Fred nodded.

We put the prisoners and our own porters in a hut in the nearest native village—less than half a mile away—under the watchful eye of Kazimoto and the shotgun, dividing Schillingschen's two large tents between ourselves. The others offered me the camp-bed as a recent invalid, but I refused, and Will won it by matching coins. We divided the blankets in the same way, and all the spare underwear. Brown and Coutlass had to be satisfied with cotton blankets from a bale of trade goods, but, when they had rifled enough to build up good, thick mattresses as well as coverings, there were still two apiece for our boys and all the porters.

The chop boxes were a revelation. The man had with him food enough for at least a year's traveling, including all the canned delicacies that hungry men dream about in the wilderness. Before we slept, we ate so enormously of so very many things that it was a wonder that we were able to sleep at all.

We all hoped Schillingschen would die, for it was a hard problem what to do with him. He had no papers in his possession, beyond a diary written in German *schrift*—that even Will could not make head or tail of for all his knowledge of the language—and a very vague map bearing the imprint of the British Government, filled in by himself with the names of the villages he had passed on his way. There was no proof that we could find that would have convicted him of nefarious practises in a British court of law.

"And believe me," argued Will, sprawling on the plundered bed, blowing the smoke of a Melachrino through his nose, "your local British judges would take the word of Professor Schillingschen against all of ours, backed up by simply overwhelming native evidence. They're so in awe of Schillingschen's professorial degree and of his passports and his letters of introduction from this and that Mogul that they wouldn't believe him guilty of arson if they caught him in the act."

The problem looked no easier next morning, with Schillingschen recovered sufficiently to be hungry and sit up. There was a look in his eye of smoldering assurance that did not bode well for us, and, when we untwisted the iron wire from his wrists to let him wash himself and eat, he looked about him with a sort of quick-fire cunning that belied his story of headache.

He was much too astute a customer to be judged superficially. I whispered to Fred not to shackle him again too soon and sat near and watched him, close enough for real safety, yet not so close that he might not venture to try tricks. He said nothing whatever, but I noticed that his eye, after roving around the tent, kept returning again and again to a chop box that stood near the foot of the bed.

Now I had unpacked that chop box and repacked it the previous night. I knew everything it contained. I felt perfectly sure he knew as well as I what the box contained, and to suppose he would sit there planning to recover canned food, however dainty, was ridiculous.

Therefore, it was a safe conclusion he was trying to deceive me as to his real intentions. Pretending to watch the box and him, I examined every detail of the tent, particularly that side of it opposite the box, away from where it seemed he wanted me to look.

THE human eye is a highly imperfect piece of mechanism, and the human brain is mostly grayish slush. It was minutes before I detected the edge of his diary sticking out from the pocket of Fred's shooting-coat, that itself protruded from under the folded blanket on which Fred had slept. It was nearer to Schillingschen than to me. After watching him for about fifteen minutes, during which he made a great fuss about his headache, I

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was quite sure it was the diary that interested him.

I stooped and extracted it from the coat pocket. The grimace he made was certainly not due to headache.

"Fred!" I called out, and he and Will came striding in together.

"That diary's the key," I said. "It's important. It holds his secrets!"

Will was swift to put that to the test.

"What will you offer?" he asked Schillingschen. "We want you to go back direct to German East. Will you go if we give you back your diary?"

Schillingschen blundered into the trap like a buffalo in strange surroundings.

"*Ja wohl!*" he answered. "Give me that, and you shall never see me again!"

At that Fred threw himself full length on his blanket and took one of Schillingschen's cigars.

But the German saw the weak side of our case in a flash.

"If you dared give that diary to your Government," he growled, "you would do so without bargaining with me! Why do you propose to let me go? Out of love for me? No, but because you dare not appeal to your Government! Give me that diary, and I will go at once to German East, not otherwise! It is only a diary," he added. "Nothing important—merely my private jottings and memoranda."

Fred turned toward me so that Schillingschen could not see his face.

"Are you willing to start for Kisumu with that book at once?" he asked, winking, and I nodded.

"Very well," he said. "Suppose you start with it tomorrow morning. At the end of a week we'll turn the professor loose to follow his own nose!"

Schillingschen shrugged his shoulders and refused to be drawn into further argument. We gave him a good meal from his own provisions and then once more made his hands fast with wire behind him and left him to sleep off his rage if he cared to in a corner of the tent.

Later that morning we sent for the Baganda—gave him a view of Schillingschen trussed and helpless—and questioned him about the man he had boasted he knew, who could tell us what Schillingschen was after. He was so full of fear by that time that he held back nothing.

He assured us the German was after buried ivory. There was a man, who had promised to meet Schillingschen, who knew where to find the ivory and would lead the way to it. He did not know names or places—knew only that the man would be found waiting at a certain place and was not white.

"How did you get that information?" Fred demanded.

"At night, months ago, in Nairobi, outside the professor's tent. I lay under the fly among the loads and listened. The man came in the dark and went in the dark. I did not see him. I did not hear him called by name. He must have been an old man. Speaking Kiswahili, he admitted he knew where the ivory is. He said he saw it buried and that he alone survives of all the men who buried it.

"He promised to lead the professor to the place on condition that the German shall release his brother and his brother's wife and two sons whom they keep in prison on a life-sentence. The professor agreed but said: 'Vait! There are first some people who also think they know the secret. Perhaps they do. Wait until after I have dealt with them. Then you shall take me to the place. After that your criminal relations shall be pardoned. There is money. Go and wait for me at the place we spoke of when we talked before.' "

We each cross-examined him in turn but could not make him change his story in any essential. He merely exaggerated the parts that he guessed might please us and begged to be allowed to run before Schillingschen could break loose and get after him.

By noontime, when we gave Schillingschen his second meal, he had made up his own mind that his case was desperate and called for heroic remedy.

"All right," he growled. "I need that diary. Hand it to me, and I'll tell you how to find what you're after!"

"You mean about the man who's to meet you?" suggested Fred blandly.

Schillingschen started as if shot.

"One of your men is an eavesdropper," Fred answered him with a cheerful nod. "That plug has been pulled, Professor!"

"Let's play the cards face up!" Will interrupted impatiently. "Listen, Schillingschen. You're an all-in scoundrel. You're a spy. You're a bloody murderer of women and defenseless natives. If we could prove that, we wouldn't argue with you. We

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know you burned that *dhow* with the women in it, but we've got no evidence, that's all. We know the German Government wants that ivory, and we know why. We also want it. Our only reason for secrecy is that we hope for better terms from the British Government.

"We've nothing to fear, except possible financial loss. If you prefer to come with us to Kisumu and have the whole matter out in court, all you need do is just say so. On the other hand, if you want to get out of this country before your diary can reach the hands of the British high commissioner—you'd just better slide, and that's all."

"You've only until dawn to think it over," remarked Fred.

"You poor boob," continued Will. "You imagine we're criminals because you know you're one yourself! The difference between your offer and ours is that you're bluffing and we know it, whereas we're not bluffing by as much as a hair—and the quicker you see that the better for you!"

"Oh, rats! Let's take him in with us to Kisumu," said I, and at that Professor Schillingschen capitulated.

"Very well," he said. "*Kurtz und gut.* I will leave the country. Permit me to take only food enough and my porters and one gun."

"No guns!" said Fred promptly.

Schillingschen sighed resignedly, and we went out of the tent to talk over ways and means. In spite of our recent experience of Germany's colonial Government, we were still so ignorant of the workings of the *mens germanica* that we took his surrender at face value. The problem of getting him down to the lake shore safely was none too simple.

I was soft-hearted and soft-headed enough to propose that we should loose his hands, now that he had surrendered, and permit him reasonable liberty. Will—least inclined of all of us to cruelty—was disposed to agree with me. We might have overborne Fred's objections if Coutlass and Brown, returning from walking off their overnight debauch together, had not shouted and beckoned us in a mysterious sort of way as if some new discovery puzzled them.

WE WALKED about a hundred and fifty yards to where they stood by a row of low ant-hills. Neither of them was in a sociable frame of mind. It was obvious from the moment we could see their faces clearly that they had not called us to enjoy a joke. They stood like two dumb bird-dogs, pointing, and we had to come about abreast of them before we knew why we were summoned.

There lay five clean-picked skeletons, one on each ant-hill. One was a big bird's; one looked like a dog's; the third was a snake's; the fourth a young antelope's; and the fifth was certainly that of a yellow village cur, for some of the hairs from the tip of its tail were remaining, not yet borne off by the ants.

The skeletons lay as if the creatures had died writhing. There were pegs driven into the earth that had evidently held them in position by the sinews. Most peculiar circumstance of all, there was a camp-chair standing very near by, with its feet deep in the red earth as if a very heavy man had sat in it.

I went back to the camp and told Kazimoto to bring one of the professor's men. Kazimoto had to do the talking, for we did not know the man's language, nor he ours.

Yes, the professor always did that to animals. He liked to sit and watch them and keep the kites away. He said it was white man's knowledge (science?). Yes, the animals were pegged out alive on the ant-hills, and the professor would sit with his watch in his hand, counting the minutes until they ceased from writhing. It was part of the duty of the ten to catch animals and bring them alive to him in camp for that purpose.

No, they did not know why he did it, except that it was white man's knowledge. No, natives did not do that way, except now and then to their enemies. The professor always made threats he would do so to them if they ran away from him or disobeyed or misbehaved. Certainly, they believed him! Why should they not believe him? Did not Germans always keep their word when they talked of punishment?"

We decided after that to let Schillingschen lie bound, whether or not the iron wire cut his wrists. The remainder of that afternoon we spent discussing who should have the disagreeable and not too easy task of taking the professor to the lake and sending him on his way in the canoes in which we ourselves had come. We sat with our backs against a rock, with the firearms beside us and a good view of all the countryside, very much puzzled as to whether to leave Coutlass behind in camp—with Brown and the whisky—

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or send him—with or without Brown—and one or two of us on the errand. He was a dangerous ally in either case.

Evening fell, and the good smell of supper came along the wind to find us still undecided. We returned to the tent, thinking that perhaps something Schillingschen himself might say would help us decide one way or the other.

"Better see if the brute wants a drink," said Fred, and I went in ahead to offer him water.

He was gone! Clean gone, without a trace or a hint as to how he managed it! I called the others, and we hunted. The sides of the tent were pegged down tight all around. The front, it is true, was open wide, but we had sat in full view of it, and not so much as a rat could have crept out without our seeing. There were no signs of burrowing. He was not under the bed or behind the boxes or between the sides of the tent and the fly. The only cover for more than a hundred yards was the shallow depression along which we had come to the capture of the camp, and that was the way he must have taken. But that, too, had been practically in full view of all of us all the time.

We counted heads and called the roll. Coutlass was close by. It did not look as if he had played traitor this time. Brown was sleeping off his headache in the shade. Kazimoto and all the boys were accounted for. The prisoners were safe. No donkeys were missing—no firearms—and no loads. The earth had simply opened up and swallowed Schillingschen, and that was all about it!

He had not made off with his pocket-diary. Fred had that. There and then we packed it in an empty biscuit tin and buried it under a rock, Will and I keeping watch while Fred did the digging and covering up. It was too likely that Shillingschen would come back in the night and try to steal it for any of us to care about keeping it on his person.

It was too late to look far and wide for him that evening. A hunter such as he could have lain unseen in the dark with us almost stepping on him. Gone was all appetite for supper. We nibbled and swore and smoked—locked up the whisky—defied either Brown or Coutlass to try to break the boxes open—and arranged to take turns on sentry-go all that night, Will, Fred, and I—declining very pointedly offers by the other two to have their part in keeping watch. In spite of lack of evidence we suspected Coutlass, and we knew no particular reason for having confidence in Brown.

XV

Turn in! Turn in! The jungle lords come forth,
Cat-footed, blazing-eyed—the owners of the dark,
What though ye steal the day! We know the worth
Of vain tubes spitting at a fantom mark
With only human eyes to guide the fire!
Tremble, ye hairless ones, who only see by day,
The night is ours! Who challenges desire?
Urrumph! Urrarrgh! Turn in there! Way!

Ye come with iron lines and dare to camp
Where we were lords when Daniel stood a test!
Where once the tired *safaris* used to tramp,
On iron wheels ye loll along at rest!
Tremble, ye long-range lovers of the day,
'Twas we who shook the circus walls of ancient Rome!
The dark is ours! Take cover! Way there! Way!
Urrumph! Urrarrgh! Take cover! Home!

The Song of the Dark Lords.

THE man who tries to explain away coincidences to men who were the victims of them is likely to need more sympathy than he will get. The dictionary defines them clumsily as instances of coinciding, apparently accidental, but which suggest a casual connection.

Lions paid us a visit that first night after Schillingschen's escape—the first lions we had seen or heard since landing on the north shore of the lake. We prayed they might get Schillingschen, yet they and he persisted until morning—they roaring and circling, never near enough for the man on guard to get a shot.

Our boys slept as if drugged, but not his. He called to them in a language that even Kazimoto did not understand, and they kept answering at intervals.

The lions took three donkeys at their leisure and scared the rest so that they broke their picket rope. Next morning out of forty we recovered twenty-five and wondered how many of them Schillingschen got.

Remembering how we ourselves had managed without ammunition or supplies, we did not fool ourselves with the belief that Schillingschen, with his brutal personal magnetism and profound knowledge of natives, would not do better.

We decided to leave at once for a district

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where he had not yet done any of his infernal preaching.

Part of our strategy was to make an early start and march swiftly, taking advantage of his physical weariness after a night in the open on the prowl, but after a few days in camp it is the most difficult thing imaginable to get a crowd of porters started on the march. It was more particularly difficult on that occasion, because none of our men were familiar with Schillingschen's loads, and the captured ten, even when we loosed their hands and treated them friendly, showed no disposition to be useful.

It was after midday when we got off at last. We had not left the camp more than half a mile behind when I looked back and saw Schillingschen where his great tent had stood, cavorting on hands and feet like an enormous dog baboon, searching every inch of the ground for anything we might have left. We three stood and watched him for half an hour, sweating with fear lest he chance on the place where his diary lay buried in the tin box. I said we had done foolishly to leave it, although I had approved of Fred's burying it at the time.

"Suppose," I argued, "he sets the natives of that village to searching—blade by blade of grass—pebble by pebble. Where they found a trace of loosened dirt, they'd dig."

"Did you bury something, then?" inquired a voice we knew too well.

We turned and faced Coutlass, whom we had imagined on ahead with the *safari*. If he noticed our sour looks, he saw fit to ignore them, but he took an upper-handed, new, insolent way with us.

"I was right. Gassharramminy! I saw two of you on watch while the third man dug. What did you bury?"

We told him to go forward. Then we looked in one another's eyes. Whether or not the original decision had been wise, there was no question now what was the proper course.

Instead of tiring out Schillingschen, we made an early camp by a watercourse, and built a very big protection for the donkeys against lions—a high thorn enclosure and an outer one not so high, with a space between them wide enough for the two tents and half a dozen big fires blazing well all night long.

Neither Coutlass nor Brown had had a drink of whisky that day; so it was all the more remarkable that Coutlass lay down early in a corner of the tent and fell into a sound sleep. Our plan was for two of us to creep out of camp when it was dark enough and recover the contents of that tin box before Schillingschen or the blacks could forestall us.

The lions began roaring again at about sundown, but they love donkey-meat, and it was not likely they would trouble us. We were so sure the task was not particularly risky that Fred, who would have insisted on the place of greatest danger for himself, consented willingly enough to stay in camp while Will and I went back.

Just as Will went toward the tent to fetch a lantern, we both at once caught sight of Coutlass creeping on hands and knees along a shadow. We had closed the gap in the outer wall of thorns, but he dragged aside enough to make an opening and slipped through, thinking himself unobserved.

To have followed him with a lantern would have been lunacy. Will ran to tell Fred what had happened while I followed the Greek through the gap, and presently Will and I were both hot on his trail, as close to him as we could keep without letting him hear us.

"Fred says," Will whispered, "if we catch him talking with Schillingschen, shoot 'em both."

WE were pursuing a practised hunter, who at first kept stopping to make sure he was not followed. He took a line across that wild country in the dark with such assurance and so swiftly that it was unbelievably hard to follow him quietly. It was not long before we lost sound of him. Then we ran more freely, trusting to luck as much as anything to keep him thinking he had the darkness to himself.

Our short day's journey seemed to have trebled itself. We were leg-weary and tired-eyed when at last we nearly fell into a hollow we recognized. Will went down and struck a match to get a look at his watch.

"There ought to be a moon in about ten minutes," he whispered. "Suppose we climb a tree and scout about a bit."

It was not a very big tree that we selected, but it was the biggest; it had the merit of being easy to climb. When the pale latter half of the moon announced itself, we could

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dimly make out all of the flat ground where the camp had been. There was no sign of Coutlass. None of Schillingschen. A lioness and two enormous lions stood facing each other in a triangle, almost exactly on the spot where the larger tent had stood, not fifty yards from us.

"Gee!" whispered Will excitedly. "We nearly stumbled on 'em!"

"Shoot!" I whispered. My own position on the branch was too insecure. Will shook his head.

"I can see Coutlass now! Look at that rock — he's hiding behind it — see! And look; there's Schillingschen!"

Neither man was aware of the other's presence or of ours. They were out of sight of each other. Coutlass on the very rocks against which we had leaned to watch the tent the afternoon before, and neither man really out of reach of anything with claws that cared to go after them in earnest.

The arrival of the dim moon seemed to give the lions their cue for action. The lioness turned half-away, as if weary of waiting, and then lay down full-length to watch as one lion sprang at the other with a roar like the wrath of warring worlds. They met in mid-air, claw to claw, and went down together — a roaring, snarling, eight-legged, two-tailed catastrophe—never apart —not still an instant—tearing, beating—rolling over and over—emitting bellows of rage and agony whenever the teeth of one or other brute went home.

Even as shadows fighting in the shadows, they were terrible to watch. They shook the very earth and air as if they owned all the primeval bestial force of all the animals. And the she-lion lay watching them, her eyes like burning yellow coals, not moving a muscle that we could see.

Iron could not have withstood the blows; the thunder of them reached us in the tree! Steel ropes could not have endured the strain as claws went home, and the brutes wrenched, ripped and yelled in Titanic agony. Their fury increased; wounds did not seem to enfeeble them. Nothing checked the speed of the fighting an instant, until suddenly the lioness stood erect, gave a long, loud call like a cat's and turned and vanished.

She had seen. She knew. Like a spring loosed from its containing box, one of the lions freed himself in midair and hurtled clear, landing on all-fours and hurrying away after the lioness with a bad limp. The other lion fell on his side and lay groaning; then he roared half-heartedly and dragged himself away before Will or I could get in position to shoot.

The second lion had hardly gone when Coutlass descended gingerly from the rock, peering about him and listening. He evidently had no suspicion of our presence. It was Schillingschen and lions he feared, and Schillingschen, clambering over the top of another rock, watched him as a night-beast eyes its prey. It was not time for us to come down from the tree yet.

Satisfied he was not followed and that Schillingschen was elsewhere, Coutlass crept from rock to rock toward the little cluster of small ones where, by his own confession, he had seen Fred bury the box. Schillingschen stalked him through the shadows, as clearly visible to us as he was invisible to Coutlass. As the moon swung higher into space, we could see both men's every movement, like the play of marionettes.

Down on his knees at last among the small loose rocks, Coutlass drew out the long knife from his boot—dug with that like a frenzied man until from our tree we heard the hard point strike on metal. Then Schillingschen began to close in, and it was time for us to drop down from the tree.

We made an abominable lot of noise about it, for the tree creaked, and our clothing tore on the thorny projections. To make matters worse, I fell headlong, rifle and all, with a clatter and thump that should have alarmed the village half a mile away. And Will, not knowing what I had done but alarmed by the noise I made, jumped down on top of me.

We picked ourselves up and listened. We could hear the short, quick stabs of the knife as Coutlass loosened and scooped the earth out. Among the myriad noises of the African night our own, that seemed appalling to us, had passed unnoticed; or perhaps Schillingschen heard and thought it was the injured lion dragging himself away.

Reassured by the sound of digging, we crept up near them. Coutlass was still on his knees, throwing out the last few handfuls of loose dirt. Schillingschen stood almost over him, so close that the thrown dirt struck against his legs.

We took up positions in the shadow, one

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to either side, almost afraid to breathe, I cursing because the rifle quivered in my two hands like the proverbial aspen leaf. The prospect of shooting a white man—even such a thorough-paced blackguard white as Schillingschen—made me as nervous as a schoolgirl at a grown-up party.

At last Coutlass groped down shoulder-deep and drew the box out.

"Give that to me!" Schillingschen shouted like a thunder-clap, making me jump as if I were the one intended.

THE moonlight gleamed on the tin box. Coutlass did not drop it but turned his head to look behind him. Schillingschen swung for his face with a clenched fist and the whole weight and strength of his ungainly body, but the Greek's wit was too swift.

He kicked like a mule, hard and suddenly, ducking his head and then diving backward between the German's legs. Schillingschen pitched over him head-forward, landing on both hands with one shoulder in the hole out of which the box had come. With the other arm he reached for the knife that Coutlass had laid on the loose earth. Coutlass reached for it, too, too late, and there followed a fight not at all inferior in fury to the battle of the lions. Humans are only feebler than the beasts, not less malicious.

Will reached for the tin box, opened it, took out the diary, closed it again, put the diary in his own inner pocket and returned the box, but they never saw or heard him. The German, with an arm as strong as an ape's, thrust again and again and again at Coutlass, missing his skin by a hair's breadth as the Greek held off the blows with the uttermost strength of both hands.

Suddenly Coutlass sprang to his feet. Breaking loose then, he landed a terrific kick in the German's stomach and closed again. He twisted Schillingschen's great splay beard into a whisp and wrenched it, forcing his head back, holding the knife-hand in his own left and spitting between the German's parted teeth; then he threw all his weight on him suddenly, and they went down together, Coutlass on top and Schillingschen stabbing viciously in the direction of his ribs.

Letting go the beard, Coutlass rained blows on the German's face with his free fist. Made frantic by that assault, Schillingschen squirmed and upset the Greek's balance, rolled him partly over and, blinded by a very rain of blows, slashed and stabbed half a dozen times. Coutlass screamed once and swore twice as the knife got in between his bones. The German could not wrench it out again. With both hands free now, the Greek seized him by the throat and began to throttle him, beating with his forehead on the purple face the while his steel fingers kneaded as if the throat were dough.

We were not at all inclined to stop Coutlass from killing the man. We came closer, to see the end, and Coutlass caught sight of us at last.

"Shoot him!" he screamed. "By ——! Gassharramminy! Shoot him, can't you, while I hold him?"

As he made that appeal, the German convulsed his whole body like an earthquake, wrenched the knife loose at last and, as Coutlass changed position to guard against a new terrific stab, rolled him over, freed himself and stood with upraised hand to give the finishing blow. Then suddenly he saw us, and his jaw dropped, the beastly mess that had been his well-kept beard dropping an inch and showing where the Greek's fist had broken the front teeth. But that was only for a second—a second that gave Coutlass time to rise to his knees and dodge the descending blow.

I made up my mind then it was time to shoot the German, but Coutlass had not grown slower of wit from loss of blood. As he dodged, he rolled sidewise and seized my rifle, jerking it from my hand. He jerked too quickly. The German saw the move and kicked the gun, sending it spinning several yards away. We all made a sudden scramble for it, Schillingschen leading, when the German turned as suddenly as one of the great apes he so resembled, tripped Will by the heel, wrenched the rifle from his right hand, pounced on the empty tin box and was gone!

Too late, I recovered my own rifle and fired after him, emptying the magazine at shadows.

Will's rage and self-contempt were more distressing than the Greek's spouting knife-wounds.

"By ——! Gassharramminy! Give me that gun of yours, will you? I go after the swine! I cut his liver out! Where is my knife? Ah, there it is! Stoop and give

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me, for my ribs hurt! So! Now I go fter him!"

We held Coutlass back, making him be till while we tore his shirt in strips—and hen our own—and tried to stanch the blood, Vill almost blubbering with rage, while he Greek cursed us both for wasting time.

Suddenly Coutlass screamed again, like mad stallion smelling battle.

"There he is! There the swine is! I see im! I hear him! Give me that——"

He reached for my rifle, but I was too uick that time and stepped back out of ange of his arm. He put his left hand to is side and scattered the hot blood up in he air in a sort of votive offering to the ods of Greek revenge and, brandishing he long knife, tore away into the dark.

"I see him!" he yelled. "I see the swine! 3y ——, Gassharramminy! Tonight his aked feet shall blister on the floor of ell!"

We followed him, enthralled by mixed notives and a sort of half-respect for the ourage of this man who claimed three ountries and disgraced each one at ntervals in turn. We did not go so fast s he. We were not so enamored of the isks the dark contained.

Suddenly there came out of the blackness ust ahead a marrow-curdling cry that urely no human ever uttered—roar; yelp f pain and battle-cry in one.

"Help!" yelled Coutlass. "Help! Oh-h! Ah!" A second later I fired, and that vas the only time in my life I ever touched lion's face with a rifle muzzle before I ulled the trigger! The brute fell all in a eap, with Coutlass underneath him and he Greek's long knife stuck in his shoulder o the hilt.

COUTLASS lay dead under the defeated lion that had crawled away to hide and lick his wounds. And in proof that Schillingschen, the com-non enemy, lived, a bullet came whistling etween us. The flash of my shot had given im direction. Perhaps he could see us, oo, against the moon. We ducked and ay still, but no more shots came.

"He's only got four shots left," Will vhispered. "Maybe he'll husband those."

"Maybe he knows by now that box is mpty," said I. "He'll stalk us on the way ack!"

"Us for the tree, then, until morning."

"Sure!" I answered. "And be shot out of it like crows out of a nest!"

But Will had the right idea for all that. He was merely getting at it in his own way. After a little whispering, we went to work with fevered fingers, stripping off the bloody bandages we had tied on the Greek's ribs—stripping off more of his clothes—then more of ours—tying them all into one—then skinning the mangled lion with the long knife that had really ended his career, tearing the hide into strips and knotting them each to each. In twenty minutes we had a slippery, smeary, smelly rope of sorts. In five more we had dragged the Greek's dead body underneath the tree.

Then I went back to the vantage-point among the rocks and waited until Will had thrown the rope with a stone tied to its end over an upper branch. Presently I saw Coutlass' dead body go clambering ungracefully up among the branches, looking so much less dead than alive that I thought at first Will must have tangled the rope in the crotch of the tree and be clambering up to release it.

The ruse worked. Georges Coutlass served us dead as well as living. Out of the darkness to my left there came a flash and a report. I did not look to see whether the corpse in the tree jerked as the bullet struck. Before the flash had died—almost before the crack of the report had reached my ear-drums—I answered with three shots in quick succession.

"Did you get him?" called Will.

"I don't know," I answered. "If I didn't, he's only got three cartridges left!"

We left the Greek's body in the tree for Schillingschen to shoot at further if he saw fit. As for the rites of the dead, it was a toss-up which was better, kites and vultures or jackals and the ants. We saw no sense that night in laboring with a knife and our hands to bury a body that the brutes would dig up again within five minutes of our leaving it. We crept away like two ghosts.

And so, hours later, we arrived in sight of Fred's fires and answered his cheery challenge—

"Halt there, or I'll shoot your bally head off!"

Before dawn the boys, peering through the gaps between the camp-fires, swore they saw Schillingschen, rifle in hand, stalking among the shadows. Nothing could convince them they had not seen him. They

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said he stooped like a man in a dream—that his beard was matted and his shirt torn—that he strode out of darkness into darkness like a man whose mind was gone. We purposely laughed at their story to see if we could shake them in it. But they laughed at our incredulity.

"My eyes are good eyes," answered Kazimoto. "I see I see!"

It was not pleasant to imagine Schillingschen, mind gone or not, with or without three cartridges and a rifle, prowling about our camp awaiting opportunity to do murder.

"Come to think of it," said Fred, "we've no proof he hasn't a lot more than three cartridges. It's hardly likely, but he might have cached some in reserve near where we found his camp pitched. More unlikely things have happened. But the bally man must go to sleep some time. He seems to have been awake ever since he escaped. We'll be off at dawn and either tire him out or leave him."

"I'll bet he got one or more of those donkeys," I answered. "He'll not be so easy to tire."

"Suppose you and Will go and sleep," suggested Fred. "Otherwise we'll all go crazy, and all get left behind!"

There did not remain much time for sleeping. The porters, being used to the tents and their loads now, got away to a good start, heading straight toward the frowning pile of Elgon that hove its great hump against a blue sky and domineered over the world to northward.

There were plenty of villages, well filled with timid spearmen and hard-working naked wives. Now that we had trade goods in plenty, there was no difficulty at all about making friends with them. They had two obsessing fears: that it might not rain in proper season, and "the people" as they called themselves would "have too much hunger;" and that the men from the mountain might come and take their babies.

"Which men, from what mountain?"

"Bad men, from very high up on that mountain." They pointed toward Elgon, shuddered and looked away.

"Why should they take your babies?"

"They eat them! Once in so often they come and fight with us and take away and kill and eat our fat babies!"

All the inhabitants of all the villages agreed. None of them had ever ventured on the mountain, but all agreed that very bad black men came raiding from the upper slopes at uncertain intervals. There was no variation of the tale.

One thing puzzled us much more than the cannibal story. We heard shooting a long way off behind us to our right—two shots, followed by the unmistakable ringing echo among growing trees. Had Schillingschen decided to desert us? And, if so, how did he dare squander two of his three cartridges at once—supposing he were not now mad, as our boys and his all vowed he was? His own ten men began to beg to be protected from him, and the captured Baganda recommended in best missionary English that we seek the service of the first witch-doctor we could find.

XVI

Who is as heavy as we, or as strong?
Ho! But we trample the *shambas* down!
Saw ye a swath where the trash lay long
And tall trees flat like a harvest mown?
That was the path we shore in haste,
(Judge—is it easy to find and wide!)
Ripping the branch and bough to waste
Like rocks shot loose from a mountainside!
Therefore hear us:
(All together, stamping steadily in time.)
'Twas we who lonely echoes woke
To copy the crash of trees we broke!
Goad nor whip nor wheel nor yoke
Shall humble the will of the Ivory Folk!

Once we were monarchs from sky to sky;
Many were we and the men were few;
Then we would go to the Place to die—
Elephant tombs* that the oldest knew—
Old as the trees when the prime is past,
Lords unchallenged of vale and plain,
Grazing aloof and alone at last
To lie where the oldest had always lain.
So we sing it:
(All together, swinging from side to side in time and tossing trunks.)
'Twas we who lonely echoes woke
To copy the crash of trees we broke!
Goad nor whip nor wheel nor yoke
Shall govern the strength of the Ivory Folk!

Still we are monarchs! Our strength and weight
Can flatten the huts of the frightened men!
But the glory of smashing is lost of late;
We raid less eagerly now than then.
For pits are staked, and the traps are blind;
The men be many; the guns be more;
We fidget with pickets before and behind,
Who snoozed in the noonday heat of yore.

* The legendary place that every ivory-hunter hopes some day to stumble on, where elephants are said to have gone away to die of old age, and where there should therefore be almost unimaginable wealth of ivory. The legend, itself as old as African speech, is probably due to the rarity of remains of elephants that have died a natural death.

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Yet, hear us sing:
(All together, ears up and trunks extended.)
'Twas we who lonely echoes woke
To copy the crash of the trees we broke!
Goad nor whip nor wheel nor yoke
Have lessened the rage of the Ivory Folk!

Still we are monarchs of field and stream!
None is as strong or as heavy as we!
We scent—we swerve—we come—we scream—
And the men are as mud under tusk and knee!
But we go no more to the Place to die,
For the blacks head off and the guns pursue;
Bleaching, our scattered rib-bones lie,
And men be many, and we be few.
Nevertheless:
(All together, trunks upthrown, ears extended, stamping in slow time with the fore-feet.)
'Twas we who lonely echoes woke
To copy the crash of the trees we broke!
Goad nor whip nor wheel nor yoke
Shall humble the pride of the Ivory Folk!
The Song of the Elephants.

WE HAD laughed at Fred's suggestion that Schillingschen might have ammunition cached away. Fred had sneered at my guess that the German might ride donkey-back and not be so easily left behind. Now the probability of both suggestions seemed to stiffen into reality.

Day followed day, and Schillingschen, squandering cartridges not far away behind us, always had more of them. He seemed, too, to lose interest in keeping so extremely close to us as we raced to get away from him toward the mountain.

If he were really crazy, as his trembling boys maintained, then for a crazy man blazing at everything or nothing he was shooting remarkably little. On the contrary, if he were sane and shooting for the pot, he must have acquired a big following in some mysterious manner or else have lost his marksmanship when Coutlass bruised his eyes. He fired each day, judging by the echo of the shots, about as many cartridges as we did, who had to feed a fairly long column of men and make presents of meat in addition to the chiefs of villages. It began to be a mystery how he carried so much ammunition unless he had donkeys or porters.

Soon we began to pass through a country where elephants had been. There was ruin a hundred yards wide, where a herd of more than a thousand of them must have swept in panic for fifteen miles. There were villages with roofs not yet rethatched, whose inhabitants came and begged us to take vengeance on the monsters, showing us their trampled enclosures, torn-down huts and ruined plantations. Several times we marshaled the men of two or three villages together in an effort to get a line to windward and drive the herd our way.

But each time, as the plan approached development, ringing shots from behind us put the brutes to flight. It became uncanny—as if Schillingschen in his new mad mood was able to divine exactly when his noise would work most harm. Our fool boys told the local natives that a madman was on our heels, and after that all offers of help ceased, even from those who had suffered most from elephants. We began to be regarded as mad ourselves.

Efforts to get natives to go scouting to watch Schillingschen and report to us were met with pointblank refusal. Rumor began to precede us, and from one village that had suffered from passing elephants more than usually badly the inhabitants all fled at the first sight of Brown, leading our long, single column.

We followed the herd. Its track was wide and easier than the winding native footpaths, and we were willing enough to jettison loads of trade goods if only we could replace them with tusks. The chase led up toward Elgon, over the shoulder of an outlying spur and upward toward the mountain's eastern slopes.

As long as we kept in the wake of the herd, the going presented no difficulties. We knew by the state of the tracks and the dung that the herd was never far ahead. Frequently we heard them crashing through trees in front of us. Yet, whenever we came so close as to hope for a sight and a shot at a tusker, invariably a regular fusillade from the eastward to our rear would start the herd stampeding with a din like all the avalanches.

Streams by the dozen flowed down from the mountain's sides, their banks crushed into bog where the elephants had crossed.

We had no trouble now from our boys. They feared the cannibals of the higher slopes but were much more afraid of the madman to our right rear. Our difficulty lay in compelling them to keep a course sufficiently to eastward and in calling a halt each day before men and animals were too utterly tired out. Yet for all their

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hurry we did not gain on the man who made them so afraid.

Elephants, once thoroughly scared, will run away forever. Our boys openly praised the herd in front for its speed and stamina, hoping it would continue on its course and oblige us to keep the madman with the rifle at a safe distance to our rear. But it seemed he had an easier line than we, or else his frenzy gave him seven-league boots, for he began to gain on us, keeping along our right flank at a distance of several miles.

It was old volcanic country we were marching through, densely wooded, virgin forest for the most part, with earth so warm at times that it was not easy to believe the crater of Elgon quite extinct. Even at that low level we came on blow-holes nearly filled in with dirt and trash, serving as fine caves for beasts of prey. We went into one for about three hundred paces before it narrowed into nothing, and we would have camped in it but for the stink. It smelled like a place where the egg of original sin had turned rotten. Fred said that was sulfur, with the air of a man who would like it believed that he knew.

At last the enemy must have made a night-march, for he passed us, and the following dawn we heard him shooting to our right in front. That morning it was simply impossible to make the boys break camp. They swore that the ghost of Schillingschen had gone in league with the elephants to destroy us, and they preferred to be shot by us rather than murdered by witchcraft.

That camp happened to be an almost perfect one, on rising ground with two great wings of rock almost enclosing it and a singing brook galloping through the midst. There was only one gap, and they closed that by rolling rocks and dragging up trunks of trees.

After a useless argument, during which we all lost our tempers and they were reduced to the verge of panic, we decided to leave them in charge of Brown and those porters, except Kazimoto, who had rifles. Fred, Will, I and Kazimoto left the camp together—with Will's personal servant and mine bringing up the rear—wondering whether we should ever see any of the outfit again. It felt like going to a funeral—or rather from it—more than likely Brown's.

KAZIMOTO and the other two should have been carrying spare rifles, but Brown had refused to remain behind unless we left him all but the one apiece we absolutely needed. We took the boys more from habit than for any use they were likely to be, and my boy and Will's bolted back to the camp almost before we were out of sight of it, Kazimoto begging us to shoot them in the back for cowards.

"Huh!" he grunted. "They are afraid of death. Teach them what death is!"

Forcing our way through vegetation that crowded around a spur of volcanic rock, it soon became evident that the whole of the huge herd was breakfasting not far in front of us, crashing about as if noise were the only object. There were elephants in every direction. We could see and hear branches breaking with reports like cannon-fire.

Kazimoto was steady as an old soldier, a great grin spreading across his ugly, honest face and his eyes alight with enthusiasm. This was the profession he had followed when he was Courtney's gun-bearer, and he kept close to Fred with a handful of cartridges ready to pass to him, whispering wise counsel.

"Get close to them, *Bwana*. Go close. Go close. Wind coming our way—smell coming our way—noise coming our way—elephant very busy eating—no hurry! No long shooting. Go right up close!"

It was easier said than done. The elephants had spread broadcast through the forest, and there was no longer one well-defined swath to follow but a very great number of twisting narrow alleys through elastic undergrowth between great, unyielding trees. We had to separate to gain any advantage from our number so that we emerged into the open more than a hundred yards apart, with Fred at the far left and Will in the center. Fred, with Kazimoto close at his heels, was more than fifty yards in front of either of us.

And crossing that mile of open land was no simple business. It was a mass of rocks and tree-roots, burned over in some swift-running forest-fire and not yet reseeded nor yet rotted down. There were winding ways all across it by the dozen that the elephants, with their greater height and better woodcraft, could follow on the run, but great stumps and rocks higher than a

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man's head—that from a distance had looked like level land—blocked all vision and made progress mostly guess-work.

However, the latter half mile was more like level going. I emerged from between two boulders, wondering whether I could ever find my way back again, and envied Fred, who had found a better track and had the lead of me now by several hundred yards. Will was as far behind him as I, but had gone over more to the left, leaving me—feeling remarkably lonely—away in the rear to the right.

Kazimoto followed Fred so closely, stooping low behind him, that the two looked like some strange four-legged beast. They were headed for the forest in front of them at a great pace, gaining on Will, who probably, like me, was more or less winded. I stooped at a pool to scoop up water and splash my face and neck. When I looked up a moment later I could see neither Fred, Kazimoto nor Will.

At that instant, when I could actually smell the great brutes crashing unseen within a hundred yards of me, a shot rang out in the forest ahead and rattled from tree to tree like the echo of a skirmish. It was not from Fred's gun or Will's. It was the fantom rifleman at work again. Schillingschen—Schillingschen's ghost—or whoever he was, he could not have timed his fusillade better for our undoing. The first shot was followed by six more in swift succession. And then chaos broke loose.

Toward where I stood, from every angle to my front, the whole herd stampeded. The forest awoke with a battle-din of falling trees and crashing undergrowth, split apart by the trumpeting of angry bulls and the screams of cows summoning their young ones. The earth shook under the weight of their tremendous rout. I heard Fred's rifle ring out three times far to my left—then Will's a trifle nearer to me, and at that the herd swung toward its own left, and the whole lot of them came full-pelt, blind, screaming, frantic, straight in my direction.

There was no turning them now. None but the very farthest on the flank could have turned, given sense enough left to do it. It was a flood of maddened monsters, crazed with fear, pent by their own numbers, forced forward by the crowd behind, that invited me to dam them if I could! As they burst into the open, more shots rang out in the forest to lend their fury wings!

I glanced behind, to right and left, but there was no escape. There were big rocks to the rear to have scrambled on, but there was no time. There was one big rock in front of me that divided their course about in halves; to pass it they must open up, although they would almost surely close again. I took my stand in line with that, as a man on trial for life takes refuge behind an unestablishable alibi.

They talk glibly about men's whole lives passing in review before them in the instant of a crisis. That may be. That was a crisis, and I saw elephants—elephants! I remembered some of what Courtney had told us—some of the mad yarns Coutlass spun when liquor and a camp-fire made him boastful. All the advice I ever heard; all my previous imaginings of what I should do when such a time came—all seemed to condense into one concrete command—shoot, shoot, shoot and keep on shooting! Yet my finger, bent around the trigger, absolutely would not act.

The oncoming gray wave of brutes split apart at the rock, as it must do, some of them screaming as they crashed into it breast-on and were crushed by the crowd behind. In the van of the right-hand wing, brushing the rock with his shoulder, charged an enormous bull with tusks so huge that the heavier had weighed down his head to a permanent, rakish angle. He caught sight of me—screamed like a siren in the channel fog—and came at me with raised ears and trunk outstretched.

I heard shooting to the left and more shots from the forest, where the very active ghost or madman was keeping up a battle of his own. I felt the fear that turns a man's very heart to ice grip hold of me—felt as if nothing mattered—imagined the whole universe a sea of charging elephants—accepted the inevitable—and suddenly received manhood back again! My forefinger acted. I fired pointblank down the throat of the charging bull. And it seemed to have no more effect on him than a pea-shooter has on a railroad train.

I had left Schillingschen's heavy-bored elephant-gun behind with Brown, because it was too cumbersome, and was using a Mauser with flat-nosed bullets. I fired four shots as fast as I could pump them from the magazine straight down the

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monster's screaming red throat, and he continued to come on as if I had not touched him, hard-pressed on either flank by bulls nearly as big as he.

PERHAPS the reason why my past history did not flash in review was that my time was not yet come. I continued to see the elephant—nothing but elephant—little bloodshot eyes aflame with frenzy—great tusks upthrown—a trunk upraised to brain me—huge flat feet that raged to tread me down and knead me into purple mud. I kept the last shot with a coolness I believe was really numbness—then felt his hot breath like a blast on my face and let him have it straight down the throat again!

He screamed—stopped—quivered right over me—toppled from the knees—and fell like a landslide, pushed forward as he tumbled by the weight behind and held from rolling sidewise by the living tide on either flank. I tried to spring back, but his falling trunk struck me to earth. On either side of me a huge tusk drove into the ground, and I lay still between them, as safe as if in bed, while the herd crashed past to right and left for so many minutes that it seemed all the universe was elephants—bulls, cows and calves all trumpeting in mad desire to get away—away—anywhere at all so be it was not where they then were.

Blood poured on me from the dead brute's throat—warm, slippery, sticky stuff. But I lay still. I did not move when the crashing had all gone by, but lay looking up at the monster that had willed his worst and, seeking to slay, had saved me.

My reverie or reaction or whatever it was was broken by Fred's voice, flustered out of breath, coming nearer at a great pace.

"I tell you the poor chap's dead as a doornail! He's simply been charged and flattened out. What a dog I was—what a greenhorn—what a careless, fat-headed tomfool to leave him alone in that way. He was the least experienced of all of us, and we let him take the full brunt of a charging herd! We ought to be hung, drawn and quartered. I shall never forgive myself.

"As for you, Will, it wasn't half as much your fault as mine. You expected me to give the orders, and I ought to have called a halt away back there until we were all three in touch. I'll never forgive myself—never!"

I crawled out then from between the tusks and shook myself, much more dazed than I expected and full of an unaccountable desire to vomit.

"—— —— your soul!" Fred fairly yelled at me. "What the —— d'you mean by startling me in that way? Why aren't you dead? Look out! What's the matter with the man? The poor chap's hurt—I knew he was!"

But that unexplainable desire to empty all I had inside me out on to the trampled ground could no longer be resisted, that was all. The aftermath of deathly fear is fear's corollary. Each bears fruit after its kind.

To my one tusker Will and Fred had brought down five and six respectively. That made twenty-three tusks, for one was an enormous "singleton." We sent Kazimoto back alone to try to persuade some of our porters to come and chop out the ivory with axes, bidding him promise them all the hearts and as many tail-hairs as they chose to pull out to keep witches away with. Then, since my sickness passed in a moment and left me steady on my legs, Fred made a proposal that we jumped at.

"Let's go and lay Schillingschen's ghost! If that was Schillingschen shooting, we've a little account with him. If it wasn't, I want to know it. Come along."

We advanced into the forest and toiled up-hill along the tracks the stampeding elephants had made. The blood on my clothing made me a veritable feeding-place of flies, until I threw most of it off, and then I began to suffer from bites I could not feel before and from the sharp points of beckoning undergrowth. My bare legs began to bleed from scratches, and the flies swooped anew on those and clung as if they grew there.

Will climbed a huge tree, at imminent risk of pythons and rotten branches, and descried open country on our right front.

After more than an hour of most prodigious effort we emerged on to rolling, rocky country under a ledge that overhung a thousand feet or more sheer above us on the side of Elgon. To our right was all green grass, sloping away from us.

There was a camp pitched half a mile away on the edge of the forest—a white man's tent—a mule—meat hanging to dry

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in the wind under a branch—two tents for natives—and a pile of bags and boxes orderly arranged. We could see a man sitting under the big tent awning. He was reading or writing or something of that kind. He was certainly not Schillingschen. We hurried. Fred presently broke into a run; then, half-ashamed, he checked himself and waited for me, who was beyond running.

When we came quite close, we saw that the man was playing chess all by himself with a folding board open on his knees. He did not look up, although by that time he surely should have heard us. Fred began to walk quietly, signaling to the camp hangers-on to say nothing. We followed him silently in Indian file. As he came near the awning, Fred tiptoed, and I felt like giggling or yelling—like doing anything ridiculous.

He who played chess yawned suddenly and closed the chess-board with a snap. He got up lazily, smiled, stretched himself like a great good-looking cat, faced Fred and laughed outright.

"Glad to see you all. Did you get many elephants?" he asked.

"Monty, you old pirate—I knew it was you!" said Fred, holding a hand out.

Monty took it and forced him into the chair he had just vacated.

"You —— old liar!" he said, nodding approvingly.

XVII

Now for opulence and place
And the increment uncarned;
We will thieve and stab and cover it with perjury,
Contemptuous of grace
And the lesson never learned
That the rules are not amenable to surgery.
We will steal a neighbor's tools
In the quest for easy cash;
Aye—jump his claim and burrow to the heart of it.
But the innocents and fools
Get all the goods, and we the trash,
And that's the most exasperating part of it!
They Toil Not, Neither Do They Spin.

NOBODY in camp slept that night. When the tusks had been chopped out and our camp carried across and pitched beside Monty's—ivory weighed—lion-proof *boma* built—and elephant-heart portioned out to the men, who gorged themselves on it in order that their own hearts might grow great and strong; when all the myriad matters had been seen to that make camping in the tropics such a business, then there were tales to be told. We demanded Monty's first.

"Wait one minute, though," he insisted. "Before I begin, have you any notion who a man with a beard could be—bruised face—broken front teeth—Mauser rifle—big, dark beard cut shovel-shape—enormously powerful by the look of his shoulders and arms? I came on him three—no, four—days' march back."

"Schillingschen!" we exclaimed with one voice.

"The man's dead. Blew his brains out with his last cartridge. Looked to me to have lost himself. Slept in trees, I should say. Clothing all torn. Hadn't been dead long when some of my boys came on him and drove away the jackals. Had he been in a fight, do you know?"

But we would not tell him that tale until we had his own.

"Mine's short and simple," he began. "Some ruffians boarded my ship at Suez, who so obviously intended to do me damage that I talked it over with the captain—giving him a hint or two of the possible reason—and he agreed to slip me off secretly at Ismailia. It was easy—middle of the night, you know—had the doctor isolate the ruffians on the starboard side while the ship anchored—some cooked-up excuse about quarantine—and kept 'em out of sight of what was happening until the ship went on again. I was quarantined at Ismailia for fourteen days, and who should come smiling into the same lazaretto on the last day but Frederick Courtney—a very old friend of mine—on his way to Somaliland. Decided to enter the country by way of Abyssinia. Told me of the advice given you fellows and assured me he'd seen King Leopold himself on the very same matter scarcely a year before. He said Leopold is hard to deal with and difficult to tie down. His advice was, go back to Elgon and hunt for the stuff there. He told me of this man Schillingschen. Said he had sent in a report about him to the home Government but couldn't for the life of him get documentary evidence with which to back up his charges."

Will whistled and drew out the diary he had rescued from the tin box. Fred nodded. Will threw it to Monty.

"I daresay you know how Courtney can make a native tell him all he knows.

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Schillingschen, he said, had eliminated pretty nearly all the likely places until Mount Elgon was about all there is left. Courtney said, too, that there were always so many thousands of elephants near Elgon that Tippoo Tib probably gathered a harvest there. We discussed probabilities and agreed that, if the quantity the old man hid was anything like what rumor says, then there were probably half a dozen hiding-places, not one. Some of it may be near here. I stayed in the lazaretto an extra day with Courtney, talking it all over. One other thing he remembered to tell me was that Schillingschen had hunted high and low for Tippoo Tib's old servants and had finally managed to have the relatives of that man Hassan—I remember, Fred, you called him Johnson in Zanzibar—thrown in jail in German East for some alleged offense or other."

Monty stopped to scrape out a faithful pipe. Then he smoked for two minutes reflectively.

"I offered Courtney a share. Knew you fellows would agree. Courtney wouldn't hear of it. Said good-by to him and took a coastwise trading-steamer back to Mombasa.

"Learned the first day there that you fellows had managed to make more enemies than friends. Put in a number of days on heavy social labor—lingered at the club—drank too much of their infernal gin-and-black-pepper appetizer—but made you fellows right, I think."

"We're not interested in the slumming. Go on and tell us what you did!" urged Fred.

"That is what I did—and undid. I made friends. Soon I had all the junior officials in a state of mind to help me if they could. Then I began to inquire for Hassan. They drew the drag-net tight and discovered him at Nairobi. A young assistant district superintendent of police, who will rise in the service—I hope—before long, discovered a woman who was jealous of a man who was just then making love to the dusky damsel particularly favored by Hassan. And in that roundabout way we discovered that Hassan intended to take a trip very soon toward Mount Elgon, where, if you please, he was to take part in Professor Schillingschen's ethnological studies.

"On condition that he held his tongue until I gave him leave to talk, I promised that young policeman to put him *en rapport* with Schillingschen's doings as swiftly as may be. Then I returned to Mombasa and got your code letter saying you would head this way. It all fitted in like a game of chess."

"How in the world did you get that letter so soon?" demanded Fred. "The missionary chap was to mail it in Ujiji, via Salisbury, Rhodesia."

"I suppose he simply didn't do that, that's all," Monty answered. "The bank manager told me he received it in the mission mail-bag—from Ujiji, yes, but by way of Muanza, Tabora and Dar es Salaam. It reached me in the nick of time. I must have been marching nearly parallel with you chaps for about a week."

"IF COINCIDENCE of evidence means anything," said Will, "we're all on a red-hot scent. That Baganda we have in our outfit is our prisoner. One of Schillingschen's pet pimps. He swears some old native, whose name he doesn't know, was to meet Schillingschen in these parts and lead him to where he actually helped bury the ivory years ago!"

"What about Brown?" asked Monty. "I hope you haven't made him partner? I agree, of course, if you have, but I hope not!"

"Nothing doing! Brown's all right, but a present ought to satisfy him."

We began to tell Monty about Brown's cattle that Coutlass stole and the Masai looted from Coutlass and us.

"Were they branded?" asked Monty.

"Branded and hoof- and ear-marked," said I.

"They're his only love," said I. "Trace them for him, and he'll never wait to receive a present!"

Dawn found us still recounting our adventures

"I regret Coutlass," Monty said. "A picturesque scoundrel if ever there was one! I'd rather be robbed by him than flattered by ten Schillingschens or Lady Saffren Waldons. I suppose, if I'd been with you, I'd have killed him. I might have regretted it all my days."

We buried our newly won ivory under a tree, locating the spot exactly with the aid of Monty's compass and broke camp, starting sleepless up the mountain. As Monty said:

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"If Hassan is on the mountain, you may depend on it he's looking for a *safari*. Let's climb to where we can be seen from miles away."

So climb we did, thousand after thousand feet, until the night air grew cold and the porters afraid, remembering tales the villagers had told them down below.

We came to caves that none of the men dared enter—vast, gloomy tunnels through which the chill wind whistled like a dirge. Yet the caverns were warmer than the wind and not bad camping-places if we could have persuaded the boys there were no ghosts in them.

The earth, too, all over that mountain and the range to eastward of it was warm in spite of the wind. In places there were warm springs bubbling from the rock, and at night and early morning a blanket of white mist, like steam, covered everything. It was a land of thunderless lightning—lightning from a clear sky, flashing here and there without warning or excuse. On the high slopes there was no game and no sign of inhabitants, until late one afternoon the porters shouted, and we saw an old man racing toward us along the top of a ridge.

He held his hands out as he ran—a round-faced, big-bellied man, unclean, unkempt, in tattered shirt and crushed-in fez—a man with one desire expressed all over him—to see and touch and talk with other men. He ran and threw himself at Monty's feet, clasped his legs and blubbered.

"*Bwana!* Oh, *Bwana!* Oh, *Bwana!*"

"Get up, Johnson!" Fred took him by the arm and raised him. "Tell us what's the matter."

"Men who eat men! Men who eat men! I had three porters to carry my tent and food. They have eaten them! Now they hunt me! Oh, what shall I do?" he blubbered. "I am old man. Who shall take my people out of jail? Who shall go to Dar es Salaam and make Germans give them up?"

"If you're willing to show us what you intended to show Schillingschen," said Monty, "I'll do what I can for your relatives."

"What can you do? Oh, what can you do? No man but a German can make Germans cease from punishing!"

Monty beckoned to our Baganda prisoner who had once done Schillingschen's dirty work.

"D'you see this man? The Germans will be willing to hand over your relations in exchange for this man. Wait a minute, though. Are your relatives criminals?"

"No, *Bwana!* No, *Bwana!* My relatives honorable folk! Formerly living in Zanzibar—going to Bagamoyo to serve in German family by invitation of person attached to German consulate—no sooner landed than thrown in jail on charges they not knowing nothing whatever about. Then Schillingschen, he finding me and say to me, 'You show where is that Tippoo Tib's ivory, and your relatives shall go free!' And Tippoo Tib, he say to me, 'You take first step to show any man where is that ivory, and you shall be fed to white ants by my faithful people!' And Schillingschen he catch two of them faithful people an' feed 'em to white ants when nobody looking that way. Oh, what shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?"

"You shall show us where that ivory is!" Monty answered him. "Stop blubbering! Schillingschen is dead. Get up! Look here! See this! Get me that diary, Will. If the Germans won't release your relatives from jail on account of this Baganda, this is a written book that will make them do it! When the Germans know the British Government in London has this book under lock and key, they will think it a little thing to release your relatives for the sake of avoiding trouble."

"Promise me, *Bwana!* You promise me!"

"I promise I will do my best for you."

"Word of an Englishman—promise!"

"Word of an Englishman—I promise to do my best!"

That was a proud enough moment on the shoulder of a mountain, with wilderness in every direction farther than the highest eagle in the air above could see, to have that helpless, hopeless ex-slave, part-Arab, part-Machenzie, put his whole stock-in-trade—his secret—all he had on earth to bargain with for those he loved—in the balance on the promise of an Englishman. It was a tribute to a race that has kept faith with men who could not by any means compel good faith.

"Then I tell," said Hassan. "Then I show."

But now a new fear seized him, and he clung to Monty, trembling and jabbering.

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"The men who eat men! Tippoo Tib, he is hiding the ivory where men who eat men can guard it and none dare come!"

IT SEEMED that in expectation of Schillingschen's early arrival he had camped within a mile of the place where the stuff was hidden, taking unreasoning courage from the bare fact of having the redoubtable Schillingschen for friend. But the cannibals—who must have been a hungry folk, for there were no plantations and almost no animals on all those upper slopes—had pounced on his three lean porters, missing himself by a hair's breadth.

In hiding, he had watched his three men killed, toasted before a fire in a cavern-mouth and eaten. Then he had run for his life, following the shoulder of the mountain in the hope of meeting Schillingschen, munching uncooked corn he had in a little bag, hiding and running at intervals for a day and a night until he chanced on us. For an old man almost sick with fear, he was astonishingly little affected by the adventure.

So we threw out a line of scouts and pounced on cave-mouths suddenly, entering great tunnels and following the course of them in ages-old lava until sometimes we thought ourselves lost in the gloom and spent hours finding the way out again.

Time and again we found bones—bones of wild animals and of birds and of fish; now and then bones that perhaps had been monkeys but that looked suspiciously like those of the fat babies mothers mourned for in the villages below. But never a human being did we see until we rounded the northeastern hump of the mountain in a bitter wind and spied half a hundred naked men and women, thinner than wraiths, who scampered off at sight of us and volleyed ridiculous arrows from a cave-mouth. The arrows fell about midway between us and them but threw Hassan into a paroxysm of fear.

"Those are the people who ate my men! That is the cavern where Tippoo Tib hid the ivory! That is where my men's bones are! See—they have torn my tent for clothing for their naked women!"

We put Hassan under double guard for fear lest he bolt again and leave us. And all that day and all the next we hunted for cannibals through mazy caverns that seemed to extend into the mountain's very womb. There were times when the stench was so horrible we nearly fainted. We stumbled on men's bones. We collided with sharp projections in the gloom—fell down holes that might have been bottomless for ought we knew in advance—and scrambled over ledges that in places were smooth with the wear of feet for ages.

Everlastingly to right or left of us or up above or down below, we could hear the inhabitants scampering away. Now and then an arrow would flitter among us, but their supply of ammunition seemed very scanty.

At night we camped in the cavern mouth to cut off all escape and resumed the hunt at dawn. But the caverns were hot—hotter by contrast with the biting wind outside, and, when in the afternoon of the second day we all came out to breathe and cool off the running sweat, we saw the whole tribe—scarcely more than fifty of them—emerge from an opening above, whose existence we had not guessed, and go scampering away along a ledge like monkeys. Some of them stopped to throw stones at us—impotent, aimless stones that fell half-way, and Fred sent three bullets after them, chipping bits from the ledge, after which they showed us a turn of speed that was simply incredible and vanished.

"Now for the great disillusionment!" laughed Will. "Hassan, go forward and show us where that hoard of ivory ought to be!"

We all expected disillusionment. Brown, who was under no delusion as to his share in the venture, scoffed openly at the idea of finding anything buried in a land where every living "crittur," as he put it, was a thief from birth. But Hassan led on in, fearless now that the cannibals were gone and positive as if he led into his own house and would show his household treasures.

He stopped before a black-mouthed chasm two or three hundred yards along the smallest subdivision of the cavern, and called for lights and a rope. We lit lanterns, and he showed us men's bones lying everywhere in grisly confusion.

"Tippoo Tib, his men," he remarked. "They throwing ivory in here; then byumby men who eat men kill and eat them. I alone living to tell. Plenty men who eat men in those days—all mountain full of them!"

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He tied a lantern to a rope and lowered it down what looked like an old vent-hole in the lava. But the little light was lost in the enormous blackness, and we could see nothing.

"Send a man down," he counseled.

We leaned over the edge and sniffed. There was a faint smell of what might be sulfur, but not enough to hurt.

"Who'll go?" asked Monty, and I thought he was going to volunteer himself.

"I go down!" announced Kazimoto cheerfully, and he promptly proceeded to divest himself of every stitch of clothing.

We made our stoutest line fast under his armpits, gave him a lantern and lowered him over the edge. For fifty or sixty feet he descended steadily, swinging the lantern and walking downward, held almost horizontal by the slowly paid-out rope. Then he stopped, and we heard him whistling.

"What do you see?" we called down.

"*Pembe* (Ivory)!"

"Much of it?"

"*Teli* (Too much)! Oh, *teli, teli! Teli, teli, teli, teli!*"

His voice ended with the very high-pitched note that natives use when they want to multiply superlatives. Then he whistled again. Next he called very excitedly.

"Very bad smell here, *Bwana!* Pull me out quickly!"

XVIII

The dry death-rattle of the streets
Asserts a joyless goal—
Reechoed clang where traffic meets,
And drab monotony repeats
The hour-encumbered rôle.
Tinsel and glare, twin tawdry shams
Outshine the evening star
Where puppet-show and printed lie,
Victim and trapper and trap, deny
Old truths that always are.
So fare ye, fare ye well, old roofs!
The siren warns the shore;
The flowing tide swings overside
Of far-off beaches where abide
The joys ye know no more!
The salt sea spray shall kiss our lips—
Kiss clean from the fumes that were—
And gulls shall herald waking days
With news of the far-seen waterways
All warm and passing fair.
They've cast the shore-lines loose at last
And coiled the wet hemp down—
Cut picket-ropes of Kedar's tents,
Of time-clock task and square-foot rents!
Good luck to you, old town!
Oh, Africa is calling back
Alluringly and low,
And they must come who hear the voice,
Nor heed Desire—Lot's wife's the choice,
And we must surely go!
So fare ye, fare ye well, old roofs!
The stars and clouds and trees
In place of you! The heaped thorn fire—
Delight for the town's two-edged desire—
For thrice-breathed breath the breeze!
For rumble of wheels the lions' roar,
Glad green for trodden brown,
For potted plant and measured lawn
The view of the velvet veld at dawn!
Good-by to you, old town!

L'Envoi.

IF ALL is well that ends well, and only that is well, then this story fails at the finish, for we never caught the cannibals—so never taught them the lesson in housekeeping and economics that they needed. But there is no other shortcoming to record.

It is no business of any one's what terms we made in the end with the protectorate Government, but, thanks to Monty's tact and influence and somebody's sense of fair play, we were treated generously. And if, when the world war at last broke out and the Germans undertook to put in practise the treachery they had so long planned, there was a secret fund of hugely welcome money at the disposal of the outnumbered defenders of British East, its source will no doubt be accounted for, as well as its expenditure, to the proper people, by the proper people, at the proper time and place.

But those who are curious and are adept at unraveling statistics might learn more than a little by studying the export figures relating to ivory during the years that preceded the war. They say statistics never lie, but those who write them now and then do, and it may be that camouflage was understood and went by another name before the great war made the art notorious and popular.

Some of the ivory in that huge hole was ruined by the heat that still lives in Elgon's womb. Some of it was splintered by the fall when yoked slaves tossed it in. Rats had gnawed some of it, to get at the soft, sweet core.

But the men who keep the keys of the bursting ivory vaults by London Docks could tell how much of it was good and what huge store of it reached them. For some strange reason they are not a very talkative breed of men.

We did not haul the ivory out ourselves.

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That would have been too public a proceeding. But any one who attempted during the years that followed 1900 to make a trip to Elgon can truthfully inform whoever cares to know how jealously and wakefully the protectorate Government guarded those lonely trails. And there are folk who saw the hundred-man *safaris* that came down from that way every week or so, carrying old ivory, said to be acquired in the way of trade. But that is really all Government business and looks impertinent in print.

We did not make enough money to establish Monty in the homes of his ancestors at Montdidier Towers and Kirkudbrightshire Castle, for that would have been an unbelievable amount; it takes more than mere affluence to keep up an earldom in the proper style. But we all got rich.

Brown received his cattle back after a long wait, as well as a present of money that set him up handsomely for life. And certain dissatisfied Masai were fined so many cows and sheep for raiding across the border that they talked of migrating out of spite to German East—but did not do it.

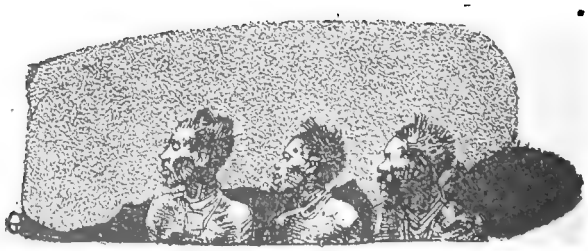
A youthful, red-headed assistant district superintendent of police was unaccountably alert enough to round up and bring into court more than a dozen natives who had preached sedition. And, being lucky enough to secure convictions in every case, he was promoted. The last I heard of him he was fighting in the very heart of German East in command of a whole brigade. So it is advantageous sometimes to do favors for stray noblemen, provided you are clever enough and man enough to make good when the favors are repaid.

And, while on the subject of favors, the four homesick islanders who had lent us their canoes and come with us all that journey were sent back to their island, followed by a launch towing two barges full of corn—free, gratis and for nothing—*burre tu*, as the natives say, meaning that the English are certainly truly crazy and giving away food without a pull-back to it simply and solely because "the people" have too much *nja*. *Nja* is the nastiest word in all those languages. It means the one thing everybody dreads—the thing that only the English seem to know charms against—want—emptiness—hunger!

At our expense, but by favor of the Government, there went to that island food enough in boxes and strong sacks—and seeds, treated against insects—and tools with which the wives could chop the soil up—for you can't expect the owner of a wife to work—to keep that island and its friendly folk from hunger for many a year to come.

Then, being free of the earth and all there is in it, we four went wandering anew.

THE END



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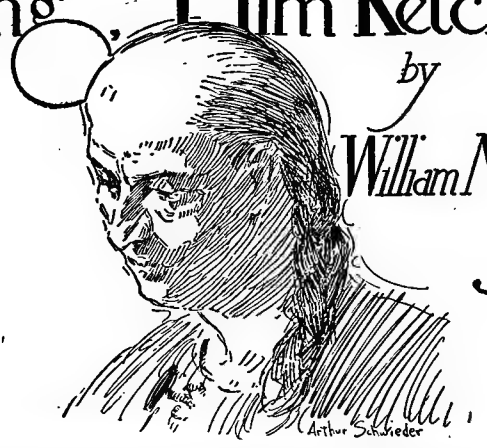
Duck Sing, Him Ketch Um!

by William M. McCoy



Author of "On the Wings of the Morning," and "Timpin' Bob."

WHY do dogs have fleas? Any one who could answer that would have been mighty welcome around the Aliso bunkhouse the Winter of the first dry year, because it was one of the questions the crew of us couldn't settle in spite of endless arguments. Why did the Lord make greasers? That was the other one. We rounded up whole herds of talk but never managed to cut out and corral an answer to either puzzle.

Useless was Tom's dog, but from a dog's view-point she owned the crew of the Aliso Rancho, beginning with Little Red and Maria, our adopted youngsters, and including Duck Sing, the Chinese cook. She was one of that sort of dog that might have been a collie or a shepherd or most anything, only wasn't. She weighed about sixty pounds, and the way brindle hair liked to grow on her was just naturally a scandal. A while before she had been badly burned in a fire, and, when the new hair finally covered the charred places, it sort of followed its own ideas as to color in each spot, ranging from lemon to the color of a red cow so that her back looked something like a map with the counties printed in different colors.

"Pore old girl," Tom said to her one night as she stopped scratching and rubbed up against his chair, making funny little noises in her nose as if asking him to do something about the fleas that were holding a convention and banquet in her thick hair, "you've got fleas, an' we've got greasers! Only it's worse for you, 'cause you went an' got yourself all scorched up savin' Little Red's life, and the blasted fleas know just where the tender new skin is," he continued, while Useless, apparently forgetting that she was no longer a puppy, tried to wriggle into his lap.

"Yes, we got greasers, but one thing we got to be thankful for," Tom nodded to the rest of us over the back of the dog, who was trying to find a place big enough to lie down; "we ain't never done anythin' to make tender spots on us. No, sir, our ornery hides are too plumb tough for them greasers to bite through."

That about rounded up our ideas. We had won a horse-race from José Lopez and his crew of wandering horse-traders and cleaned them of the money they had won from the boys down on the Conejo. A greaser is a bad loser, and we figured he was back of the trouble which had spread through the wood camps of the Aliso and infected all the greasers in the Topa Topa country. It wasn't anything we could exactly lay our hands on; it was sort of behind our backs—that is generally the way with trouble when greasers are mixed in it.

When California was part of Mexico, the old dons in the southern part of the territory owned enormous herds of cattle—but they had no market for meat. Instead they shipped cargoes of hides and tallow, throwing the meat into the ocean. The

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dons were mighty fine people, but this business of shipping tallow earned them the name of "greaser." But, when the gringo came and the old order changed, the name was no longer applied to the dons but in sort of derision to the humblest natives, the descendants of the Spanish soldiers who came when the State was a province of Spain and the Indian women whom they had married.

These descendants of mixed blood soon practically replaced the Indians. The same thing happened nearly all over Mexico, and the term was gradually stretched to include all of this humble race of mixed blood. The Indian may be a long way back in the greaser, but it's there. And, when a greaser starts out to brand a gringo, all the other greasers, even the good ones, are on his side.

But what could José and his crew do to us? There were eleven of us, skinners and riders. We owned no stock for them to try to run off, no property for them to destroy. Maybe our backs felt sort of lonesome sometimes when we were alone with the greasers in the wood camps, but, aside from keeping a sharp watch for trouble, we didn't really worry. That is, none of us did except Duck Sing. The old heathen was mired in anxiety and mumbled to himself in Chinese as he went about his work.

But, in spite of the dry Winter and the greasers, it was always sort of sunrise in Springtime inside of us, for we had our youngsters, and they were perfectly well and cuter than ever. Before "Red" Antone left us the kids, we hadn't had much to think about except rounding up new cuss-words to keep our mules awake. But the children had given us so much more to live for than we had ever dreamed of, that we just couldn't think much about anything else.

Before and after school Maria took care of Little Red under Sing's jealous eye, and, when he looked at them together, a sort of light would spread over his yellow face. Useless had to love every one and everything on the ranch to death or explode, but, when it came to Little Red, there just weren't any comparisons.

Tom whittled a gun out of wood for Little Red, and the little scamp and Useless spent hours every day in hunting imaginary wild beasts around the barns and corrals. The wooden gun and these adventures turned the talk to hunting and shooting when we gathered in the cook-house in the evening, and Little Red's dark eyes grew rounder and rounder as each one of us tried to tell a bigger lie than the one who had just finished. In a few days we had to wring the necks of a dozen bears or slaughter a whole herd of buffalo in imagination in order to get him even mildly interested.

Then one evening, when we came up from the corrals, we heard the little chap's voice rising and falling to emphasize his points, in exact imitation of Tom telling an extra big one. Outside the cook-house window we stopped and peered in. Little Red was seated on Sing's knee, gun in hand, while Useless looked up at him with worshiping eyes.

"I saddle my moole," the little chap was saying, "take my gun an' den whis'le to my ol' huntin'-dog, Ooseless. Den I wide way up on Topa Topa an' kill fifteen bears! Den Ooseless pick 'em up in he mouf an' b'ing 'em home, an' Duck Sing cook 'em for supper!"

"Heap sma't boy! Little Led velly sma't boy!" we heard old Sing approve as we backed away, almost choking in our efforts to keep from laughing aloud and disclosing our eavesdropping.

After supper Maria proudly recited a piece she had learned at school, and then Little Red, as if anxious to contribute his part, gravely told his bear story. That about made our evening complete. We figured our pair of youngsters beat any five cards in the deck.

"Gosh," exploded Tom, when Sing had taken the children to put them to bed, "if he can tell 'em like that now, what will he be able to do when he grows up!"

"He's shore plumb full o' talent," declared Larry, "but we got to be careful an' go a leetle slower, or he'll grow up into one o' these here story-writers!"

Just the thought of such a calamity stopped our discussion, and we turned in silently. Next morning Jim put the crew of us to hauling and stacking straw, and we forgot 'most everything else mighty quick. The rains had held off until our foreman was worried, and he decided to haul in the straw from the threshing-machine settings in the fields, and a young mountain of the stuff began to grow

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between the mule corrals and the new storage barn.

If the grass did give out on the range, the straw would keep a lot of cattle from actually starving to death for quite a while. Jim was playing safe, but we were wishing we knew how to pray for rain. Any one who has ever stacked straw knows why.

THE evening of the day we finished, we sat around on the edges of our bunks and prophesied rain. The children were in bed in their little house close by the bunk-house, and, as we couldn't get Jim excited about the weather, we turned to Useless for a little amusement.

"Maybe you got fleas, Useless," admitted Tom, "an' we know you don't deserve 'em, but, if I was you, I wouldn't talk about anythin' itchin' until I'd tried wearin' a flannel shirt lined with barley beards chopped fine. My shirt is——"

He stopped to listen. Something seemed to make us tense. Then the ugly glow of flames lighted the windows.

Stampeding outside, we found the huge straw stack a mass of flames. Being skinners and riders, we thought first of the stock, the horses and mules in the barns and corrals and endangered by the flames. Just as we were, we rushed through the fire-lit night. It was plain the great stack had been set on fire in half a dozen places, and we believed all the barns were in danger, but the cook-house and bunk-house were safely distant.

The flames met at the summit of the huge pile and seemed to leap into the middle of the sky. The corrals ran down each side of the long stables, with full length lean-to sheds sheltering the mangers. The stock was all loose, of course, roaming about in the corrals and sheds at will. We rounded up every critter *muy pronto*, in spite of the fact that the glare and roar of the fire made them hard to handle, and drove the herd into the lower field, where they would be safe.

Not until then did we think of investigating, but, by the time we got around to that, there was little to do but watch the straw burn. Only the absolute absence of wind saved the other buildings. The roar of the fire filled the stillness, and the glare of it seemed to light up even the mountains. Embers rose high in the heat and drifted, starting a good many little blazes, but we managed to beat them all out with wet sacks. When at last the roar grew less, other sounds drifted to us.

"Is that Useless barking?" Tom asked when a group of us came together. "She must be shut up in the bunk-house."

We listened, and it did seem as if we could hear a faint barking, and this reminded us that our youngsters might be frightened. As there was little to do at the fire then, half a dozen of us trooped back to let Useless out and to reassure the children. But the bunk-house door was open. Useless wasn't there. And she wasn't in the cook-house, and neither was Sing. Then we heard her bark and rushed to the little house where the children slept.

The door was shut, and the outside latch was hooked. We opened the door but stopped an instant as if we had collided with something mighty solid. The room was a wild jumble of smashed and overturned furniture. Bloody and weak, Useless crawled to meet us. In a corner old Sing lay, bruised and dazed, Maria sobbing in his arms. Little Red was gone!

"I yell loud, but you no hear 'um," Sing said weakly. "I tly fight —— hard, but five—six men too many. Useless bite an' fight. They hit 'um with club. I think she dead, but she wake up. I ketch um Malia—but they take Little Led!"

Useless and Duck Sing were not buckaroos. At the first sign of danger they had run to the children. If only one of us had—but we hadn't.

"Who were they?" gulped Tom, on his knees comforting Useless and examining her injuries.

"They have bandanna on face, but, when I hit 'um, they cuss in gleaser. They gleaser!"

We looked at each other dumbly. No one had to tell us this was the greaser horse-traders' revenge—that the fire had been a decoy to get us out of the way. While we helped Sing to his feet, Maria still clung to him. The silence seemed to boom a dirge of despair in our ears. Then Tom's voice shattered the silence in an awesome curse, and curse after curse of vengeance boomed in the little room. Then again came the silence that hurt.

"No can ketch um that way," Sing announced with his Oriental finality; "mus' go after um—an' go quick!"

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Jim was still watching the fire, and we breathlessly gulped the news, while the other boys came running.

"Ketch up some horses an' saddle 'em," Jim instantly ordered. "Lopez is campin' over Santa Susanna way. If they git there afore we do, they'll have to——"

But we did not hear the rest; we had already stampeded into the lower field to catch the horses. But we were in a tearing hurry; the stock was half locoed by fright; the field was heart-breakingly big, and it was a long job. When we were at last ready, Jim sent some of the boys off scouting in all directions, while he galloped up the valley at the head of the rest of us. Mile after mile, league after league, we pounded along on the direct road to the camp of the horse-traders, each rider prepared for trouble in his own way, while we skinners carried our blacksnake whips coiled around our necks.

One hour—two hours—and the only sound was the thundering hoofs and rasping breathing of madly running horses. Through the pass and down the winding, ink-black cañon we pounded. Anger choked and blinded us. But, as the leagues swept by, we began to think less of revenge and more of rescue. At last I grew rational enough to note a peculiar twist in the stride of my mount. Recalled to the present, I suddenly discovered I was not on a horse at all! In the darkness, my mind fused on one thing, I had saddled the first animal I had caught and was astride the orneriest mule in my whole team!

The moon was in the last quarter, and it rose only in time to throw a ghostly light over the encampment of the horse-traders as we halted on a hill above it for a consultation. The camp spread in a half-circle in a bend of the creek, smaller tents surrounding one more than twice as large. Jim was giving Larry and Pete orders to cautiously ride around back of the camp so as to stop any one who might try to escape, when it seemed as if all the dogs in the world started barking.

Jim swore and spurred toward the camp, with the rest of us following at a furious gallop. Several figures ran out of some of the smaller tents, then slipped into the large central tent, as silently and swiftly as shadows. Pete and Larry had their ropes ready, and, as they dashed in, they roped the top of the big tent and pulled it down upon all those inside so that they could do no shooting. Then all the riders circled the camp, swinging around and around at a hard gallop, keeping the greasers inside the circle. We skinners rode into the center and dismounted, our snakes ready.

When Jim called for Lopez, a muffled voice answered from beneath the wrecked tent, and a moment later he crawled out. Just as he straightened up, Pete's rope, seeming to come from nowhere, settled over him, and his arms were pinioned to his sides. Then we got a lantern, lined up every one in the camp, men, women and children, and searched through bedding, tents, camp duffle, hay, wagons, everything—but Little Red was not there.

Lopez was furious. His crew looked pretty ugly, but except for their chieftain not one of them said a word. If a child whimpered, a woman quieted it instantly. Lopez fumed, declaring he knew nothing of the kidnaping of Little Red, and threatened us with the law for our attack upon his camp.

But we knew a little about greasers and told Lopez we would take him, with two others of his band, to the officers of the law so that they could make their complaint. He must have burned his tongue cursing, but we tied him and the other two on their own horses and started back toward the ranch. At daylight we met the other boys in the pass at the head of the valley, but they had nothing to report.

WE HAD hardly reached the ranch when some of the boys of the Flying H and Circle Six came loping in to help with the search. Leaving Lopez at the ranch under guard, we saddled fresh horses and called upon every greaser in the valley. All day and all night we rode, rounding up the people of the wood camps by force and pulling protesting greasers out of bed in their ramshackle little ranch-houses while we searched and questioned. But, when we gathered at the ranch just after sunrise, almost too weary to sit our tired horses, not one of us had discovered a clue.

Then Tom had an inspiration. It was simple. Tie Lopez to a tree and singe his hide with a blacksnake until he either told the truth — or fainted. If he fainted, why, wait until he woke up and then whip

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him a[gain] and keep on until he told us what. We were sure he knew. When this schem[e] was explained to Lopez, he protested that he could not tell what he did not know, but, before we got him tied to the big oak beside the cook-house door, his voice had become plaintive—and at last the yellow-hearted coyote collapsed without a blow being struck—and told us that Juan Guiterez had kidnaped the boy!

While we were getting ready to call on Juan, who owned a tumble-down little ranch just over one end of Sulphur Mountain, Sheriff Joe Walters and two of his deputies rode up. The news of the kidnaping had reached the county-seat, and he had come right away.

"I'll wait here an' take care of this snake, while you boys round up Juan," he decided after we had told him what we had done and outlined our plan of action. "If I go, I can only arrest him on suspicion, and we all know he won't talk. Under the law I can't force him to. But you boys ain't handicapped by my oath."

When we rounded up Juan in front of his ramshackle barn, he was as smooth as grease, indignantly denying any part in the kidnaping and declaring that Lopez was a liar and his enemy. We decided he was a little too smooth, tied him to a big sycamore in his own yard, and Tom limbered up his blacksnake.

"Listen to me a minute, Juan," Jim interrupted the greaser's protestations. "Your name ain't been bad. I know you lizards will lie seven ways from Sunday to save another o' your own breed, but it ain't goin' to work this time. You talk now. Tell the truth, or Tom'll skin you alive with that loaded whip!"

Juan knew that was so, and it seemed to refresh his memory. He said he had had nothing to do with the kidnaping, but that Salvador Martinez, one of Lopez's men, had brought the boy there. He and his wife had hidden them both during the next day, and then Martinez had taken the boy and gone on. We were prodding him for more when Juan's wife came timidly closer, moaning incoherently about the *muchacho*. We soon knew that she had taken part in the crime only because *of fear* and that she had been kind to Little *Red*, giving him food and striving to quiet *his* terror.

Becoming more coherent, she told us that Martinez was bad, much feared among his own people. He had boasted that he would take Little Red to Los Angeles and leave him with some people in Sonoratown there who would care for him and keep him safely out of sight. Later, through agents and when he considered it safe, he would offer to return the boy for a ransom.

Then she broke down again, sobbing while she told us that Martinez had boasted that he never would be caught with the boy—that he would kill the lad first—and warned us that pressing the chase too closely while Martinez had the boy would surely mean Little Red's death. Gradually she became incoherent again, finally ceasing to talk, rocking her body back and forth and moaning. We could not help but believe the woman. And we knew greasers and knew the danger was very real.

Releasing Juan, we rode back to the ranch, weary, silent, so worn with fatigue and worry that we had forgotten all about revenge and longed only to have Little Red back, safe. Joe Walters communicated with the police and sheriff in the city, urging them to do their utmost but to proceed with caution.

Days and nights passed, and we went through them automatically. Useless would not eat and spent most of her days close to Little Red's vacant bed, nosing the covers now and then and whining as if trying to attract his attention. In the evenings she apologetically dragged herself into our laps and looked yearning devotion in her efforts to comfort us—but that only reminded us of the little chap telling his bear story. When Maria was not with Sing, we kept her with one of us. Except for our clumsy efforts to comfort her, we were silent.

Little Red had been gone a week, with no progress reported by the police, when Duck Sing announced that he was going to take Useless, go to Los Angeles and find Little Red.

"I tly ketch um; I got plenty cousin in Chinatown," he said.

We looked at him and realized for the first time how worn and stricken the old heathen had grown. Lines crisscrossed his yellow face, and somehow all the life seemed to have gone out of it. Dazed by our own grief, we had not thought of him. But then we remembered that Sing

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was old. He was in a strange land. We had each other, but the poor heathen had no one else to help him bear his sorrow. Sing loved Maria, but Little Red was a boy, and the little chap filled the old yellow man's heart.

We urged him to go, though we had no idea what he could do. And next morning I drove him, with Useless, to the railroad. We never knew all that Sing did after he reached the city. He could not go out and search the streets and alleys himself, for, if any of the gang of horse-traders were with Little Red, wherever he was, they would recognize Sing, and the alarm would be given. But Sing and his "cousins" laid out a campaign.

Inside of two days scores of Chinese vegetable-peddlers, distributing their goods in every street in the city, watched for a sign or news of a curly-haired boy while they clumped to back doors to call "veg'ee'boo!" Dozens of laundrymen, delivering linen fresh from suds and irons, kept eager watch and listened just as eagerly for a hint of new arrivals. Sixty-year-old "boys," under the weight of long poles, from the ends of which chairs in need of repair, or just repaired, hung, trotted through side streets as alert as quail.

Their Oriental wares in baskets swung from the ends of long bamboo poles balanced on their shoulders, peddlers worked strange communities, their eyes eagerly peering from under the brims of their wide coolie hats. Wong Foo, the scribe, sat before his little stand with its ink-pots and bright papers, watching Chinatown pass to and fro before him, his ears eager for a word.

In every block in every street in the city, bright eyes in yellow faces watched, but, of course, they were especially keen in Sonoratown, the greaser city within Los Angeles. Spreading through many crooked and ancient blocks, Sonoratown is the home of thousands of greasers, all living as close to the ground as possible. No matter how cramped the quarters, the greaser stays on the ground floor. Ancient adobe houses lined most of the streets, the rooms all facing the street and opening into one another in endless succession. Here and there were little shops with barred windows and four strong adobe walls, the front door the only door.

Within the courts, formed by the narrow, shake-roofed adobes lining the four streets of a square, were other adobes, or shacks, or sometimes thatched *ramadas*, all teeming with humanity and dogs. The ground of the courts was packed hard and generally swept clean. But here and there the tiniest of gardens grew—a patch of corn a few yards long beside a wall, a bed of peppers a few feet square in a corner. Beside many doors single plants, carefully tended, glowed with bright flowers.

Here was the greaser's own town. Protected by the laws of State and nation, he yet chose to live according to his own law—or lack of it. Lazy and fairly peaceful, in many ways he was little affected by the gringoes who ruled him. But the greaser has one law. He will give no information about one of his own breed to a gringo.

Vegetable-peddlers added the narrow streets of Sonoratown to their routes, and, while they sold little or nothing, they faithfully offered their wares day by day. The sixty-year-old boys looked for chairs whose bottoms needed recaning where they knew there were no chairs. The peddlers slippety-slipped through streets and courts, offering their Oriental wares where there was boundless curiosity but no buyers. No white man could enter those courts without causing comment or arousing suspicion, but a Chinaman is only a Chinaman—even to a greaser, and the peddlers and boys pursued their search unsuspected.

AS TIME went along without word from Sing, the suspense ate out our hearts, but there didn't seem to be anything for us to do. We told ourselves that Little Red was alive; we would not believe anything else. But just thinking of the little chap, alone, frightened, abused as we knew he would be, was almost more than we could bear. At last Jim took a notion that Sing might need some help and sent Tom and me to town. In the city we called on the police, and they told us all they had been able to find out in one word, and that word was "nothing."

Then we went to Chinatown to find Sing. The going was easy enough, but finding Sing proved another matter. Chinamen hurried here and there along the cramped sidewalks beneath the second-story balconies; groups overflowed into the narrow streets, while now and then a fat shopkeeper

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stood in the door of his shop, smoking his queer, long-stemmed pipe. Except for the smokers, they all seemed to be talking, singing their jabber as they hurried or loafed and all seeming to feel happy—or however it is a heathen feels when he laughs.

Up and down the narrow streets Tom and I wandered like a pair of lost souls, wondering what the turkey tracks meant on the red paper bills pasted to the walls on all sides and trying not to look too curiously at the Chinese women whom we chanced to pass—no matter how plain or fancy their silk trousers and blouse were or how wonderfully oily and ornate their hair. Small boys looked wonderingly at us. But we were even there, for a youngster of four or thereabouts in lavender trousers, yellow jacket and purple hat was quite a sight for a skinner when he was sober.

Everywhere we were treated courteously—but every Chinaman we accosted denied ability to speak English. We knew most of them were lying, but they were so blasted polite about it and acted so sorry that we couldn't do anything but stammer. That was not all that made us feel out of place. Somehow we felt sort of conspicuous among all those heathen. Maybe it was because we could feel every pair of almond-shaped eyes watching us, alert, suspicious.

There was little ornamentation along the ground floor of the Celestial streets, but the merchants liked to live over their stores, and the galleries, serving as front porches of the homes of the well-to-do, were sometimes remarkable. A Chinaman is like a skinner in one way—he likes real colors. The posts of these balconies were painted red and blue, while many of them were surrounded by banisters made up of scores of carved panels, the figures in the panels being gilded and the other carving painted in bright colors.

And every balcony was festooned with wonderful lanterns in countless shapes and sizes, all covered with brightly colored silk. The banisters looked almost solid from the street below, but they were in reality carved screens, behind which the women of the household could sit and see what was going on without themselves being seen.

After a while we got tired of exploring the thronged streets; tired of the joss-house idols, carved screens and Oriental incense; mighty weary of the ever repeated "No sabbe" in answer to our questions. So we decided to try strategy. Our plan was to enter a shop and buy something and, when the proprietor had waited upon us and talked English, to ask him. But what should we buy?

From shop to shop we went, peering into the semi-darkness inside, where bottles bearing labels covered with turkey tracks were stacked on shelves, cans and chests similarly marked reposed on counters, while mysterious crockery jars were everywhere. Most of the shops seemed to have good stocks of dried crab-legs and lobster-claws, displayed in prominent places along with many other things which did not impress us with a feeling of confidence. At last we decided to ask for tobacco and tramped into a shop.

The merchant greeted us with courteous dignity and in answer to our request produced the tobacco. He was very polite, folding his hands across his stomach while he explained one or two things on his shelves that we asked about, and he listened to our questions regarding Sing with the same politeness—but, after pretending to think deeply, he denied konwledge of any such person as our cook, advised us to see Wong Foo, the scribe, and bowed us out.

We found Wong Foo seated at his table on the corner. While we made our query, he watched a truck heavily loaded with matting-covered bales as it rumbled past, then turned to us a face absolutely blank. Tom repeated his question, but the wizened heathen pretended to be deaf and dumb, grabbed one of his Celestial brush-pens, made a lot of turkey tracks on a sheet of red paper and held it up for us to read.

"Gosh," gloomed Tom, "but ain't this a sociable hole! Come on, 'Two Pair,' I got to find a hitchin'-post an' indulge in a little neighborly talk!"

But, even if everything was a blank mystery to us, there was plenty going on in Chinatown in regard to Little Red. Every evening yellow men came to slip through the shadows of the narrow alleys, disappearing in mysterious doors between tiny shops, to report and to listen. One night Hop Far, an old vegetable-peddler who had been offering his wares daily in Sonoratown, brought word that a child in a ragged dress had dodged past a woman at the gateway to one of the courts and had tried to run to him. But the woman

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had caught the child and dragged it back, stifling its screams.

We did not know anything about this at the time, but the next afternoon Tom and I gave up trying to find Sing and wandered through Sonoratown, too morose and discouraged to notice the bright eyes which smiled at us from beneath gay *rebosos*. In front of a meat market we stopped to look through the barred window at the array of pepper-cured sausages, tamales and jerked beef displayed inside.

"Singin' meules!" suddenly gasped Tom, grabbing my arm and swinging me around. "Look at that Chink vegetable-wagon comin' down the road. If that ain't Useless on the seat beside the Chink, I'm a—a—come inside afore she sees us!"

INSIDE the dingy little room we nodded to the proprietor and pretended to be inspecting his wares while we watched. The Chinaman stopped his wagon just across the street at the end of a long adobe and before the entrance to a court. Without being conscious of it, we noted that the horse he drove was an unusually good one. Horses cost money. Consequently Chinamen take good care of those they own. But this horse was a real one. Maybe he was a little old, but, if he wasn't a veteran of the city fire department, "retired"—and sold, we didn't know horses.

The old Chinaman methodically climbed down from the wagon, unsnapped the strap which held Useless to the seat and lifted her down. While Useless rushed around, wild with delight over the myriad new and highly-flavored smells, a crowd of women in loose dresses and with bright *rebosos* covering their heads surrounded the vegetable-wagon. We became so interested that we forgot our caution, and the proprietor of the shop, sensing that something was going on, went to the door. Suddenly Useless became frenziedly excited, rushing here and there, her nose close to the ground. At last she leaped against the gate of the court, barking furiously. Almost instantly came a cry—a cry that seemed to stop our hearts.

But, before we could move, there was an upheaval among the vegetables in the wagon. The women screamed, while carrots, turnips and cabbages rose in the air and then rolled here and there—then from under his covering of garden truck a man emerged, a hatchet in one hand.

"It's Sing!" bellowed Tom, and we leaped for the door.

But we only bruised ourselves. The heavy door had been swung shut. The latch on the outside held in spite of our prying and pulling. There was no other door. The heavy adobe walls and the bars on the window made our cage complete.

But we could still see, and we got back to the window just as the proprietor, who had locked us in, entered the house across the street on the run. Women were screaming, and men came running from all directions. But the Chinese vegetable-peddler had produced a knife that looked as long as a man's arm. A few blows of Sing's hatchet broke down the gate, and with Useless in the lead the two old Chinamen rushed out of sight.

We gave up hope of ever seeing Little Red or Sing again. The street was thronged with screaming men and women; dogs rushed here and there, barking and snapping, and bedlam was king. But, while we watched, something opened an aisle through the mob, and we could see Sing running toward the wagon with what seemed to be a bundle in his arms. And then we saw it was Useless who opened the path for him. Useless flew at anything or any one that blocked their way with all the fury of a jungle mother, and the old peddler brought up the rear, covering the retreat with his knife.

Sing placed his bundle in the wagon, climbed in himself, and the peddler picked up the lines just as Useless got aboard over the tail gate. I don't know what that Chink said to his horse, but that big bay must have thought he heard a fire-gong again, for he just naturally went away from there, while carrots, cabbages and onions flew in all directions. Through the mob he plowed with the bit in his teeth, and swung round the next corner at a grand gallop, spilling vegetables at every jump.

Just when we decided that our jailer was never coming back, we heard the outside latch lift. We were ready to receive him—but, when we violently jerked the door open, it was to face a girl—an unsuspecting customer, who was as surprized as we were. Just then we were in too big a hurry to hunt up our host, the butcher, and hurried out to take up the trail of the vegetables.

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The greasers had collected most of them, of course, but here and there a carrot or something had been mashed or overlooked.

Around corners and through crooked streets the trail led us, and all the way it was plain that the horse had thought he was going to a fire. He had been going mighty well when he swung down Alameda Street, and he must have turned loose an extra burst of speed when he turned into Apablasa Street, Chinatown.

Trying to walk unconcernedly, we approached Wong Foo's stand—but he was still deaf and dumb. Chinamen hurried here and there, jabbering constantly, and the narrow streets were fairly choked with suppressed excitement. But everywhere we received the same answer. "No sabbe" appeared to be the only words a Chinaman could say which we understood. For an hour we moped like lost dogs among the hurrying yellow men. Then we accidentally paused before a door in a blank wall between a butcher shop displaying a varnished pig and a stall where Chinese bulbs were sold.

While we were moodily wondering what to do next, the door opened and out came the old Chinese vegetable-peddler who had driven the wagon. We grabbed him, but all our questions brought only the one answer from the suspicious heathen—

"No sabbe."

Then we knocked on the door—and knocked some more. At last it opened a trifle, and a very dignified heathen in blue silk asked our pleasure. We told him we were from the Aliso Rancho and wanted to find Sing. He was too polite to call us liars, but he was taking no chances. For some moments he thought deeply as if trying to summon Sing before his memory—and then suavely advised us to ask Wong Foo! But we had asked Wong Foo, and our voices rose high as we argued. Finally he called to several Chinamen, who came from an inner room, the crowd blocking the narrow passage back of the door. In answer to his lengthy harangue in Chinese, they all shook their heads.

"Duck Sing? No sabbe him," one averred.

"Quit your stallin'," growled Tom. "You know him well enough. Tell him Two Pair an' Tom, from the Aliso Rancho, are here an' want to see him."

"You come Liso Lancho?" considered the first heathen. "Mebbe yes—mebbe no! I guess no! I no sabbe you!"

But just then came a scratching among the feet of the heathen blocking the passageway, and an instant later Useless was doing seven kinds of a dance, giving half-articulated little barks and trying to kiss us both all over at once. We just went down on our knees and gathered her into our arms.

"I sabbe now!" nodded the Chinaman. "Dog sabbe more betta as man sometimes. You bet you my life! You Tom an' Two Pair, all lite. You want um Li'l' Led? Gleaser steal um, d'less um like girl, but Duck Sing, him ketch um!"

We followed our new-found heathen friend down a dark passageway, through a room where the air was heavy with Oriental incense and into another room. Slowly our eyes became accustomed to the half-light. In the center of an attentive group sat Sing, and on his lap was a curly-headed little chap in sky-blue silk trousers, jacket of embroidered purple silk, a yellow silk cap with a red button on his head and brocaded Chinese slippers on his feet. It was Little Red!

Little Red dressed in all the glory which Chinatown afforded! In one hand he held a hunk of some heathen sweet, while he was gesticulating with the other. We wanted to yell, but someway we didn't just then. For the time being we could only look. Sing was as dignified as one of the idols in the joss-house, but we knew he was bursting with pride. Subconsciously we heard Little Red's serious voice.

"I saddle my moole," he nodded, "take my gun an' den whis'le to my ole huntin'-dog, Ooseless. Den I wide way up on Topa Topa an' kill fifteen bears! Den Ooseless pick 'em up in he mouf an' bing 'em home, an' Duck Sing cook 'em for supper!"

"Heap sma't boy! Velly sma't boy!" applauded the laughing Chinamen, and that broke the spell that held us.

With a yowl we charged like locoed steers and hugged Little Red—and, yes, that old heathen of a Sing, too. We couldn't help it. The world was good, and we wanted every one to know it. Someway we felt that we would explode if we didn't tell them. But that blasted heathen of a Sing was scandalized.

"Skinner allee time clazy, plenty clazy!" he apologized to his "cousins" when he had wriggled out of our clasp. "What fo' you

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step on two—th'ee Chinaboy, Tom! You allee samee locoed, no sabbe sense!"

But no anger showed in the ring of yellow faces surrounding us, even if some of the heathens were rubbing spots where our boots, during our stampede, had become rather familiar for such short acquaintance.

"Duck Sing, him ketch um!" repeated the Chinaman who had answered the door, laughing. "Mebbe Two Pair an' Tom like some tea, yes?"

"Tea! Gosh!" exploded Tom, with Little Red in his arms. "If that's your drink, deal me a hand! I'll try anything once, with this crew!"

AFRICAN TRAILS

by THOMAS S. MILLER

THE British built wide roads in Nigeria—broad, rolled, macadamized roads, constructed at enormous expense and along carefully surveyed lines that went straight to the objective. These roads cut many days and unnumbered miles off the tortuous twistings of the native trails, and quite naturally the authorities thought the blacks would take advantage of the time-saving innovation. But there they miscalculated the African. The long, sunburned, shadeless road was unbearable to the naked feet; it was monotonous—lacking the thousand little surprizes the childlike barbarian found on his native trail; it was contrary to the custom of the centuries; it was *ju ju*—an interference with nature.

The trail which the black loves has meandered across bush and desert for a thousand years, deviating not a foot from the path beaten out by the first lazy caravan, which detoured around a boulder rather than take the trouble to roll it out of the path. Or here it swings around nothing, where once the skeleton of hippopotamus or dromedary had obstructed the route. The skeleton has long since powdered to dust and oblivion, but the detour remains. It takes a wide sweep out toward a huge, spreading baobab, whose friendly shade is so welcome for a rest and chat; or, again, it swings off at a sharp angle from the direct, for no apparent cause whatever. But when that first caravan beat it out a black heron had flown across the path and the superstitious Africans saw in it bad omen—threatened danger. Or it swung out to take in a village, which has passed into oblivion through the decimating sleeping sickness or was swept away by an Arab slaver—but the detour remains.

One can construe the story of that first caravan—its checks, hindrances, mischances—from the present trail. It added a dozen miles to its course to take in wells of which no hint remains. The idle black loves to wander the old trails, whose crumbling sands are so much more comfortable to the feet than the British macadam; he loves the twistings and turnings and changes; to gather bugs and beetles and small lizards as he goes for the supper-pot of mealies, to see the gleaming yellow eyeballs of the leopard in the elephant-grass, to waken the bush silences with marching song, note the spoors of wild beasts.

Always a rare tree in the sun-glared, open country invites, for there the trails converge and he can count on meeting a stranger and indulging in mutual exchange of experiences. The long, wide, hard, shadeless road—why, that is the folly of the white man. The ways of the white man are inscrutable. There is some mystery—some diabolical purpose behind the white man's road. The black will none of it, but stays by custom on a trail as wasteful as a reluctant schoolboy's loitering way to school.

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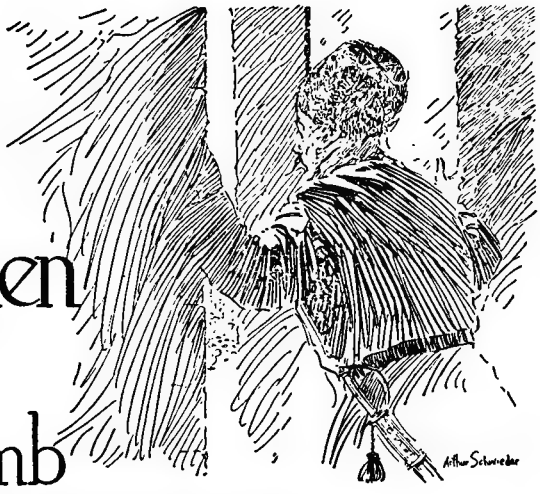
The Star of Evil Omen

A Complete Novelette



by H. A. Lamb

Author of "Khlit," "The Roof of the World," etc.

When a man touches the thread of Fate, he is like the blind who feel their way in darkness. His wisdom is less than the grain of sand in the Great Desert.

When a warrior ventures into the unknown, he also is like to the blind. If he is foolhardy, his grave is dug before the close of the first day's journey.

Yet if a warrior is brave, he sees his path clearly. For even in the dark there are stars, some of good omen, some of evil.

Chinese proverb.

AT THE mountain-pass above the river Kerulon, Khlit, the Cossack, reined in his horse. It was the early seventeenth century when the Kerulon marked the boundary between Chinese territory and the land of the Tatars, the scene of many hard-fought battles.

In spite of his sixty-odd years, Khlit, known as the Cossack of the Curved Saber to his enemies, was not accustomed to waste thought upon his past. As he looked back, however, down the dark gorge to the river and the level steppe beyond, still warm under the rays of the setting sun, he rested his scarred hands on the peak of the saddle.

It was his last look at the steppe that had been his home for several years. Such places were few in Khlit's life. Yet this Tatar steppe, just south of the waters of Lake Baikal, was much like the plains of his Cossack days, and therefore Khlit was meditative.

He had chosen. And, having chosen, he had no regret. Of his own will he had given up the leadership, his place as Kha Khan, of the Jun-gar Tatars, who were the last survivors, except for some bandit tribes of the frontier, of the race of Ghenghis Khan.

To Khlit's mind that had been the only way. He was a Christian, and the men of the Jun-gar were followers of Natagai or of the Dalai Lama. He had made enemies among the priests and the other khans. So long as there was fighting, his shrewdness, born of a dozen campaigns, won him respect.

Now, he mused, the paladins of Tatary waxed fat as well-fed hunting-dogs. They had horses and cattle in plenty. He had nothing.

"There will be a *kurultai*," Khlit had told the khans one evening, "a council of the chiefs."

Because they were curious, the khans had come to his *kibitka* without exception. Khlit, during his rule as Kha Khan, had never called a council unless an important event was forthcoming. So the khans had come, grim fighters of a warlike race, who had found kinship in the Cossack who had in his veins of the blood Ghenghis Khan and who wore the sword of a dead Tatar hero.

He had done right. Khlit had no doubt about that. Once before this he had been the victim of jealousy in the Cossack encampment, and he had gone forth alone. Wandering, he had obeyed the call of his race—of men born to the saddle, accustomed to roving.

Khlit's words to the Jun-gar chiefs had been few. He would not be the leader, he

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said, of men who had it in their heart to choose another. Let them select a younger man for Kha Khan.

He had given back to them the metal ornaments of rank—the gold neckband and silver-chased belt and scabbard. They had taken them. Khlit, they knew, was old. There were deep lines in his lean face, although his back was straight when he sat in the saddle. The flesh was spare on his sloping shoulders.

In Khlit's thoughts was the memory of those who had been his close companions in the battles with Chinese and Kallmarks. But Berang was the new Kha Khan. And burly Chagan, the sword-bearer, was hereditary attendant of the Kha Khan of the Jun-gar.

Truly, he reasoned, it was well. He had ridden from the encampment that same night. Emotion and talk were for women. Yet Chagan had filled the beakers of the khans with *tarasun*. They had drunk with him the *tarasun*.

"He is of our blood," Berang swore, "and he has shared our meat and kumiss. Let him choose the best of our horses, men of Tatary, and riders to attend him."

Khlit had accepted no more than the one horse Chagan brought him—a mettled steppe pony. He was accustomed to go his way alone.

It did not escape him that Berang, flushed with his new dignity, had been silent when he left the Tatar *yurts*. And Chagan had been moodily drunk. Not too drunk to hold his stirrup and touch his knee to his own breast in farewell, after the manner of the Tatars. Then it was that Khlit made the speech that lingered in the mind of the khans.

"I have shared your bread and wine," he said, "and one tent has sheltered us both. I have become rich in the kinship of brave men. When snow comes to the steppe, you shall have a gift from me. Such a gift as shall honor our friendship."

Word of Khlit's promise passed through the encampment. For, thought the khans, how could he send to them a gift after he was gone from the steppe? He had taken neither men nor gold. How was a gift to be gleaned from the bandit tribes of the borderland, or the sands of the Great Desert?

The khans knew that Khlit was not given to idle words. And, with the coming of snow, they remembered what he had said.

Khlit, they supposed, would return to the territory of the Cossacks. He turned his horse, however, to the east—to the northern edge of the Great Desert which is called Kobi, beyond which is China. This was a new land, and he entered upon it with a light heart.

Khlit started, as he sat his horse, noting that the sun had left the distant steppe. The cold of night gripped the gorge, and the Cossack dismounted. Tethering his horse in a thicket, he gathered some brush for a fire. Wrapping himself in his sheepskin cloak and saddle-cloth, he sat by the fire, munching the dried beef that had been warmed against his horse's back under the saddle. This, with a drink of kumiss from the flask in his saddle-bags, completed his meal.

Truly, thought the Cossack dreamily, it was well to be afoot again. What other life was fit for a man than that with a horse's barrel between his knees, a pipe in his mouth and open plains before him! Slaves sat by the hearths in the *yurts*. Swine lay in their wallow. To be at large was best. In this manner he had gone from the steppe to the mountains and to another steppe.

Aye, it was good to feel the night wind in the face!

China, he mused drowsily, was the land of treasure. He had heard there were khans who numbered followers by the thousand. Here there would be fighting, the sharp clash of swords, the taking of rich spoil. Here were men of wisdom who played high stakes—life and fortune. Soon he would see, with his own eyes, the Dragon Emperor that travelers had described—the land of the hat and girdle. Of the Yellow Banners, where even the gongs were gold and warriors traced their blood a thousand years.

THE way from Tatary to China lay along the hinterland of the desert of Kobi—a space peopled by wandering tribes of both races. Through this Khlit pushed as rapidly as possible, avoiding the caravan routes and keeping to the open steppe.

Thus it was that he came abreast of the Togra Nor and its ravines. The Togra Nor, a mist-shrouded lake, lay among the defiles overlooking the northern caravan route. From the defiles a convenient point was offered for the *barrancas*—raids—of the steppe clans. Khlit, guiding his horse

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straight to the east, found himself among the rocks of the Togra.

These were no ordinary rocks. Veiled in the customary blue haze of the Mongolian plains, they formed a waste of defiles, barren of the tufts of steppe grass, with occasional lakes in which were mirrored cold white mountain-peaks. Unwilling to turn back, Khlit kept to his course, wending deeper in the purple ridges in spite of the uneasiness of his horse.

It was the second day of his entrance into the Togra defiles that he saw the first human occupant of the place. On a rock peak a horseman stood outlined against the sky. A glance identified him to Khlit as one of the outlaw riders of the steppe. Khlit took no further notice of the man, who appeared not to have seen him, but reined in his horse at sight of smoke rising in a gorge near at hand.

It was Summer, but the Mongolian steppe is never warm, and the Togra was chilled by its rock heights. No game was to be seen, and the Cossack had had no opportunity to replenish his stock of smoke-dried meat by use of his pistols. His horse had sensed the presence of an encampment, indicated to Khlit by the smoke, and, where an encampment was, forage might be obtained.

Hence it was that Khlit trotted up the defile and came upon a *yurt* of rather more than the usual size. It was cleverly located in a bend in the ravine—some two dozen felt tents ranged in a clump of stunted larch. A woman, laying milk curds to dry upon a flat stone, ran to the tents at his approach.

Khlit noted that a large number of horses were grazing in a grassy stretch further along the defile—a number too large for the size of the *yurt*. The fact that they were watched by an armed rider tended to confirm his suspicion that the beasts had come to their present position not altogether lawfully. This, however, was a common matter on the steppe, where horses were wealth.

It was the appearance of the khan who stepped from the tent into which the woman had run that excited his interest. The man was of medium height but so broad that he seemed of unusual size. His heavy hands hung well to his booted knees. A black silk cap trimmed with fur and a red shawl around the waist of his horse-hide coat indicated that he was a plainsman of Khirghiz descent. His broad head had a lop-sided air, owing to a missing ear, probably carved off by an unlucky sword-stroke.

The khan's slant eyes were set wide apart, and his heavy features indicated mingled good-nature and dangerous temper. All this Khlit, who was wise in the ways of men, noted as the other came forward and took his stirrup. When he dismounted, the khan touched him courteously on the chest.

"Greeting, brother rider of the steppe," his voice rumbled forth in enormous volume. "Why have you come to the *yurt* of Dokadur Khan? Ha! May I feed the devil's swine, but you have a good horse. How came you past my sentries?"

His glance, good-natured and shrewd, swept Khlit. The Cossack had discarded his Tatar clothes for sheepskin coat, leather belt and horse-hide boots. Even the owl's feather denoting his descent from Ghenghis Khan he no longer wore. In the eyes of Dokadur Khan he might be a well-to-do horseman of Tatar speech but unknown descent. Wherefore the Khirghiz was curious. Khlit had heard of his companion, a bandit of the Togra.

"The sentries were drunk if they saw me not," he responded carelessly. "I wish to see the noted khan whom men call Dokadur. Hence I am here."

Other men had gathered around the two, with some women in the background that Khlit guessed to be captives. The burly khan surveyed him agape.

"Ho!" he muttered loudly. "That is a good jest. For the fools of the caravans will travel a day's detour to keep from my *yurt*. Your name?"

"Matters not."

The khan's black eyes sparkled with curiosity.

"You came from Tatary, eh?" he hazarded clumsily. "Perchance you can find ripe picking in the caravans. Camels can be cut out by one rider, and the Manchu guards are fools."

"It may be. The Togra is not far from the China frontier?"

"Two days fast riding is the Liao River, and a hunting pavilion of the emperor. When the World Honored One—may his arrival in purgatory be speedy—hunts, there is rare spoil for the plucking."

Dokadur Khan ushered Khlit into his tent and seated his guest by the side of the fire, sunk in the center of the earth floor. At his side a woman poured out the *tarasun*—fermented mare's milk—from a barrel. The other warriors crowded the enclosure.

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But Khlit, familiar with the ways of the steppe, knew that he had nothing to fear as long as he was in the *yurt* of the khan. A guest by the fireside is inviolable.

"You like not the Dragon Emperor?" He tugged at his long mustache thoughtfully.

"Nay; how should I?" roared the other. "When his guards cut us down as if we were leper beggars by the highway."

"Yet your *yurt* is near the Liao."

"The Togra is a rare nest for the outlaws. Plundering is good. Nay, there is talk of a new hunt of the Lord of Ten Thousand Years—may he die without honor!" Dokadur Khan glanced sidewise at Khlit, as if to observe the effect of his speech, as he fondled a hooded falcon on a perch beside him. "I have sent the word to the outer districts of the Togra."

"Hey," laughed Khlit, for it was his custom to learn what others knew, "then your men wax fat on the slain game?"

"And on the hunters," chuckled his companion. "A plump mandarin adorns himself with more silks and jewels than a dozen merchants."

"Stripped of his clothing," added Khlit shrewdly, "the mandarin fetches a good ransom."

"Eh, that is true," grinned the khan.

The suspicion had faded from his eyes, which had become moist from the heady drink. Here was a meet soul to drink with, whatever his name. He ordered the kettle of mutton, which had been preparing, to be placed between himself and his guest. Around them grouped the listening warriors and behind them the women. The dirty urchins sought place as best they could, while the dogs whined expectantly against the tent felt.

It was the evening meal of the *yurt*.

KHLIT was accustomed to observe his surroundings keenly. Hence it was that he still lived in a time when few men survived middle age. His wits, sharpened by conflict with many races, had grown more alert with the years that weakened the vigor of his sword-arm.

So, before the boys who had brought water and cloths to cleanse their hands had departed, he had assured himself that the followers of Dokadur Khan were men above the average of the steppe bands, that the khan himself enjoyed complete mastery over them; that his rule embraced the entire Togra, and that, for all his protestations of enmity to the Chinese, his loyalty was for sale to whoever paid best.

From Khlit and the khan the mutton kettle had passed to the men and then to the women. By the time it reached the urchins, there was little but bones and sinew. Khlit noticed that one boy had armed himself with a bare thigh-bone and was fighting the dogs with it for the morsels they had ravished from the mess. On an impulse the Cossack tossed the child his half-consumed portion.

The boy caught it eagerly, laying about him sturdily to drive away the dogs, and vanished through the tent-flap with a surprized glance at his benefactor. Dokadur Khan grunted. But the act had caused Khlit's pistols to flash in the firelight.

"Those be good weapons," observed Dokadur Khan, scanning them enviously. "I will buy them."

"Nay," Khlit laughed. "I will not sell."

"There be two, of Turkish workmanship. I will give a horse for them."

The Cossack shook his head. He was not willing to part with the serviceable weapons—and still less willing to have them in the hands of the Khirghiz. The other growled.

"Then you are one without wit. I have said I desire the pistols. Is my will a light thing to be put aside?"

"And I have said I will keep them."

Dokadur Khan puffed at his pipe sulkily. Khlit regarded him calmly.

"So long as you are within the *yurt*," muttered the other, "I can not lay hand on you. It is written. But, when you leave the *yurt*, my men will follow and slay you for the weapons. If you give them now, you will not die, but there will be no payment."

Khlit's teeth gleamed under his mustache.

"A jackal snarls when it may not bite. But who fears a jackal, Dokadur Khan?"

The other's hand went to his sword, and his lip lifted in a snarl. But Khlit did not look at him.

"Nameless one of unmentionable fathers!" the Khirghiz swore. "It is well you are in the Togra. You can not leave unseen, and my men will take the weapons from your carcass before you are a mile into the defiles."

Khlit knew that Dokadur Khan would do his best to keep his promise. But he knew

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he was safe as long as he remained in the *yurt*. He leaned closer to the other.

"Harken, Khan," he said slowly, "we be two men with wise heads, you and I. Women quarrel over trinkets. I have heard that Dokadur Khan is skilled above other men in taking horses and in plundering where the danger and the spoil is the greatest. I have seen that this is true. Hey, you are a falcon that takes only the swiftest fox or the strongest antelope."

Mingled feelings showed in the Khirghiz' flat face. Pleasure combatted suspicion. His guest was one who cared nought for his feelings, yet who implied that they had common interests. A man of pride and, perhaps, one with a message.

"The falcon that flies highest," he responded surlily, "can best see the game afoot. Here in the Togra we hear of events in the steppe and over the frontier."

"Then you have heard when the Dragon Emperor comes to Liao to hunt."

"Within a week or less."

"With many followers?"

Dokadur Khan threw back his head with a roaring laugh.

"Nay, you must be from a distance, if you know not that Wan Li hunts with an army. Aye, an army of thousands; blue and yellow banners of spearmen, armor-arrayed beaters by the hundred; the nobility of Liao province. His pagoda is moved upon the backs of fifty oxen——"

"Rare plunder for a shrewd man."

The khan stared, his grievance forgotten.

"Wan Li's court! Nay—" he shook his head helplessly—"the Forbidden City itself is not safer than the imperial riches. A hundred beaters die in the time between sunrise and dark, for his sport. Have the *rakchas* sent madness upon your head?"

Khlit shook his head, and the Khirghiz saw that there was no folly in the keen, deep-set eyes under the tufted gray brows.

"Nay, Dokadur Khan, I would not steal, even from Wan Li. But spoil! There is the reward of the brave fighter. Is the Son of Heaven too high for the glance of a khan such as yourself? Nay, I have seen the citadel of an empire taken by men who had no other virtue than that they rode three hundred miles in three days."

The light of memory in his eyes, the Cossack told the plainsmen what he had seen—a part of it—in his journey from Russia, through Persia to Mongolia. As they listened, the men drew nearer the fire eagerly. Here was a tale fit for true men!

"Truly," protested the khan at the finish, "I fear not the men of the Dragon Emperor—even though the guards of the Golden Tomb be near at hand in the Liao Hills. But I have not two thousand men. It can not be!"

"Can a hooded falcon strike? Nay; only one that soars."

"But how?"

Khlit pointed across the fire to the west.

"A fool tells what he is about to do. From where I have come, are men who have no fear of the Dragon army. This much will I say. Be watchful during the hunt. For the end of the hunt will be the Seventh Moon, which is favorable to foes of the Dragon."

There was no mistaking Dokadur Khan's growing interest. Khlit's recital, capped by his vague promise, had fired his *tarasun*-heated brain.

"By keeping your men ready with arms at hand and your eyes keen. Is the Dragon the only one to hunt?"

Dokadur Khan pondered this with an air of wisdom. There was respect in the glance he cast at Khlit, also burning curiosity. He was aware that his followers were stirred by the words of their guest, and he did not wish to appear ignorant of what was afoot on the steppe.

When the talk ended, Khlit had gained two points. He had aroused the interest of the brigands and possibly gained himself allies, of a sort, if he should need them in the Togra. And he had taken the khan's mind from his pistols.

Of this last Khlit could not be sure. Morning might bring thought of his promise to take the weapons, to Dokadur Khan. Men of that type were fickle. It might be well not to put him to the test. His respect for Khlit had mounted; still . . . .

Khlit settled the matter himself by stealing from the tent long before dawn when the encampment was wrapped in sleep. He attracted no attention. Yet, when he walked to where his horse was picketed, he heard a step beside him and turned, hand on sword.

"Lord," a small, high voice came out of the darkness, "I had thought that the honorable one might leave before it was light. I read wisdom in his look, and those

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who are wise do not trust to Dokadur Khan. So I waited without the tent."

Khlit peered at the shadow beside him and made out the figure of the boy to whom he had thrown the meat. He laughed softly.

"Eh, little warrior," he chuckled, "you will be a leader of men some day, and perhaps a horse-thief."

"If the honorable one says that," cried the urchin proudly, "it will come true. I listened under the tent-wall, and surely the honorable one has the wisdom of the earth at his will. It was such a tale as I have never heard."

The boy kept close to the Cossack's side as the latter saddled his horse and mounted.

"Now," he whispered importantly, "I will show the khan a way to leave the Togra before the riders of Dokadur can reach him."

Khlit leaned down.

"Have you a horse, O one who will be great?"

"Nay," the lad muttered; "they say I am too young——"

"Come, then," chuckled Khlit.

He swung the child up to his saddle-peak. The lad gasped, half in fright, half in pleasure.

"Show me now this way from these cursed ravines."

By dawn they were many miles from the encampment. Khlit had little fear that his trail could be followed. Still he did not rein in his horse until they reached at midday the last of the ridges and came out on the level plain. Then, to the boy's sorrow, he set his comrade down.

"Harken, little khan," he growled. "Before many hours the men of Dokadur will come out near here. If not, go to one of the sentinels. Bear this as a free gift from me to Dokadur. Bid him not forget the seventh moon."

He put one of his pistols into the hand of the delighted lad and added some beef as an after-thought.

"It will earn you a better share of mutton," he laughed. "Say to the khan that I forced you to come with me. And remember the seventh moon."

"He shall hear," swore the child, "on my life!"

"I doubt it not. Health and honor to you!"

With that Khlit spurred off eastward across the plain in high good-humor. As long as he was in view, the boy stood in the defile holding the weapon clasped tight. Not until Khlit had vanished did he remember he was hungry and eat the dried meat. It was well, he thought triumphantly, that the old khan had not offered him reward. For true men do not reward one another, more than the trust between them, for a service asked and given.

II

A water-clock tells the passing of time: if the owner of the clock dies, it will not stop. Only when there is no more water will it stop.

Chinese proverb.

AT ONE of the locks on the upper Liao stood the fish-house of Lun Chang, of lowly ancestors. When the crews of the outward-bound junks rested from their labors, they entered the fish-house of Chang to throw dice and to barter for dried fruit and salt fish. Thus it was that Chang prospered and heard much of what came to pass in Liao province. And, as with men of higher caste, his good fortune was his undoing.

It was late one afternoon of the sixth moon that Chang, his skinny hands folded in his sleeves and his straw-shod feet crossed under him, saw a small river-junk draw in to the bank and a tall plainsman with some difficulty land himself and his horse.

The stranger mounted at once, not clumsily, but with a leap that brought a glint to Chang's lined eyes. A horseman, thought the fish-dealer, and one from the plains. Undoubtedly possessed of a full purse of *taels*. Wherefore his kowtow was respectful.

"Health and an honorable life, uncle," he chattered; "is it your will to grace my insignificant shop with your presence? Food of the finest——"

Khlit scowled. He knew but a few words of Chinese, and the patois of Chang missed its mark. But the nature of the house was self-evident. He pointed to an armful of cherry branches not yet stripped of their fruit or leaves.

"Bring me these, Swine Face," he growled in the Tatar tongue.

Chang, however, knew the dialects of the frontier.

"It shall be as the lofty one desires," he said, picking up the branches. "Lo, here is luxuriant fruit, grown in the gardens of

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Wei Chung-hsien himself. Nay, will the honorable one——"

Khlit had caught the burden from him and placed it before his horse. Not until he saw that the animal was feeding well did the Cossack seat himself on a bench without the shop, calling for dried fish. When Chang had satisfied his wants, the shopkeeper lingered near, curious as to the man who fed his horse better than himself.

"You are from the plains, uncle. You come in good time, for the Son of Heaven himself, with many of his court, comes in the Dragon Chariot to Liao province to the hunting pavilion of Wei Chung-hsien."

Khlit tossed the man a coin and kept on eating. Chang stared curiously at his tanned face and gray mustache. His visitor, he was sure, was no Tatar; nor was he a Manchu. Then, what?

"You have come to take part in the hunt, uncle? Perhaps you are one of the plainsmen sent for by his Excellency, Wei Chung himself, to tell of the whereabouts of game."

Khlit knew that it would be well to adopt some story as to his coming. The suggestion of Chang, he reflected, would serve very well. He had little fear of recognition by the Chinese, in his new attire. Few of the latter had seen him, and they were either dead or scattered with the armies of the empire. Still, his face and tongue would excite inquiry from the spies of the emperor. The fish merchant, doubtless, would repeat what he knew. And recognition would mean death to Khlit, who had fought against the Chinese more than once.

"Aye," he responded indifferently, "a plainsman."

"Then you will have honor at the hunting pavilion, good sir," gossiped Chang, "for the hunt must not fail of success, especially as it comes in the seventh moon, which some astrologers say is unpropitious for the emperor. It took all the arts of the beautiful Lady Li, the favorite, to bring him to Liao, it is said."

"Is the master of an empire obedient to the whim of a woman?"

Chang looked around him cautiously and lowered his voice.

"I have heard many rumors, honorable hunter. A junkman from the Forbidden City swore, when he had several beakers of wine, that the Lady Li, of the tiny feet, holds the heart-strings of Wan Li. In all but name she is empress. She is as fair as a pink sunrise—although that is a topic not for my profane tongue—even if she was once a harlot."

Khlit grunted with distaste of the man's whispering. Yet here was tidings Khlit needed. He tossed another coin to Chang. This time it was gold. The fish-dealer thrust it eagerly into his belt with a quick glance at his visitor.

"It is music in my ears," observed Khlit, "to hear such news of the Dragon court. There is little heard of such things on the steppe. Say on."

Momentary suspicion gleamed in Chang's faded eyes. It was dangerous to talk of those in power in Liao. But he loved gossip. And the stranger undoubtedly was a man from the steppe, and not a spy.

"Harken, uncle. Beyond the hunting pavilion of Liao is the Fourteenth Tomb of the Ming dynasty, called the Golden Tomb because of the treasures buried with the forefather of Wan Li. The Son of Heaven, in his august pleasure, is a lover of the chase. He was displeased when the astrologers declared that the seventh moon was one of bad omen. The emperor plans, it is rumored, to visit the pavilion in order to burn incense before the grave of his great ancestor, as is the custom. Then at the same time he will hunt. Thus, by his mission of prayer, the ill luck will be averted, and he may still enjoy a hunt."

Khlit did not smile at the manner in which the Dragon Emperor had saved his face. The ways of the Chinese were new to him, and he pondered.

"And Wei Chung—whatever the devil calls himself?" he asked. "Truly, you know many things, Chang."

The dirty fish-dealer was plainly flattered.

"Wei Chung-hsien," he explained, "is an honored eunuch and advisor of the munificent Wan Li. All unworthy, I speak the names of such great men. The home of Wei Chung-hsien is in the province here, and it is said he is head of the spies of the Dragon throne, besides being one of the clouds of Heaven. He has the trust of Wan Li—a mighty eunuch."

Khlit's probing brain pieced together the fragments of the fish-dealer's gossip—with a grim curiosity as to the land where such as Chang bandied rumors about the court.

The Lady Li, it appeared, owed much of her influence over Wan Li to the fact that she was the mother of a child—who was not

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the heir to the throne. Thus, without the title of empress, she was still the favored woman of the court—a court unequaled in the Ming dynasty for magnificence. Rumor stated that she was as ambitious as she was beautiful.

Wei Chung-hsien had been the emperor's friend from birth—a confidential advisor and intimate of the astrologers. His position as master of the spies naturally gave him access to all information that came to the court, wherefore he was much sought after by nobles who wished to better their fortunes.

"What kind of a man," broke in Khlit impatiently, "is this emperor who has women and near women for councilors?"

Horror showed in Chang's face at this remark. The fish-dealer might gossip concerning the Lady Li, but the person of the Son of Heaven was of celestial purity. A generous monarch, he cried, dutiful to the spirits of his ancestors and peace-loving, leaving the management of his armies in the hands of Wei Chung-hsien. Khlit tugged at his mustache moodily. The picture was not to his liking.

A sudden silence on the part of Chang caused him to look up. Along the bank of the river a small cavalcade was coming toward the inn. Several horsemen preceded a black sedan with yellow trimmings. Beside it walked two stout mandarins in gorgeous dress.

"A sedan of the court," whispered the fish-dealer hurriedly. "Bow!"

Khlit remained seated as he was, but the other advanced a pace and bent his head nearly to his knees. Not content with this, Chang kneeled in the dirt and pressed his head to the ground. Abreast of the shop the sedan halted, and one of the silk-robed personages approached them.

KHLIT had not seen such an individual before. The man's sleeves hung below his knees; the blue-green of his robe was faced with yellow, and a tiny dragon was embroidered near the throat. A stout man, with smooth flesh hiding his eyes.

The newcomer halted and surveyed the prostrate fish-dealer, who bobbed his head without looking up. Then he said something Khlit did not understand. Chang rose on his haunches with a muttered reply. Khlit saw the figure of the fish-merchant stiffen.

Without further speech Chang got up and went into the house. He came out with a wooden spade. The man of the dragon robe pointed to the earth near the building, and Chang set to work to dig. Khlit saw that several sailors, who were looking on, had fallen to their knees. The face of Chang was dripping sweat, and in it Khlit read something akin to deadly fear. At times the dragon-robed individual kicked him.

Something was in the air. Khlit noted that the horsemen had come closer and were watching idly. From the latticed window of the sedan-chair he thought he saw a face peering, a small face, half-veiled by a fan held before it. A pair of dark eyes were visible over the fan. They belonged, thought Khlit, to a woman. He was not sure.

By now Chang had dug some two feet below the surface, for the ground was soft—a hole some six feet by two. He worked feverishly, aided by the kicks of the other. His legs were trembling. Then Khlit saw the dragon robe turn toward the sedan. Apparently some message passed between the occupant of the chair and the other, for the man stepped to Chang's side. The fish-dealer dropped his spade with a hoarse cry.

Quickly and without waste of effort the man of the dragon robe placed one hand over Chang's forehead, catching two fingers in the nostrils. A knife flashed in the other hand. The man then drew the knife deftly across the throat of the fish-dealer.

Khlit saw the legs of Chang crumple under him, and Chang himself fall into the newly-dug hole. The man in the dragon robe motioned to the onlookers, who took up the spade and began throwing the dirt back on the body. The slayer of the fish-dealer tossed the bloody knife down and turned to Khlit.

The Cossack, surprized at what had happened, understood that the other was asking his name. He thought quickly.

"I am a huntsman," he said in the dialect of the plainsmen of Dokadur Khan, "come to the pavilion."

The Chinaman's brow cleared.

"You are one of those—summoned?" he asked in the same dialect.

"To the hunt."

"By order of——"

"Wei Chung, of Liao," hazarded Khlit shrewdly.

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The gossip of the slain Chang had served him well.

"Where do you come from?"

"The border. Is it not well? I have been told——"

The man held up his hand for silence.

"It is well, hunter. I am Ch'en Ti-jun, a eunuch of Wei Chung's. You can speak freely to me. What is your name and caste?"

Khlit glanced around at the watching sailors.

"That is for the ears of him who sent for me," he said slowly; "not for others."

The eunuch nodded approvingly.

"A fool is light of tongue," he commented. "Yonder carrion that was Chang, the fish-dealer, gossiped concerning the name of a woman high in favor in the eyes of the Son of Heaven. Now he is sped to his ancestors unhonored."

Khlit remembered the face he had seen behind the lattice of the sedan and guessed that the dark eyes might belong to the Lady Li. He said nothing, however, mounting his horse and joining the cavalcade which resumed its course away from the river. This he did at the bidding of Ch'en Ti-jun.

As he rode, he summed up what he had learned. Clearly, Wei Chung-hsien had sent for certain men from the border. Khlit had told the eunuch that he was one of this number. Ch'en Ti-jun would doubtless report as much to his master. Meanwhile, Khlit's position at the hunting pavilion would be safe.

What did Wei Chung desire of him? How would he explain his coming to the latter? Time would take care of that, thought Khlit, who was accustomed to rely on his wit. In this manner did Khlit come to match his skill against the men of the Dragon in the contest which only ended at the second gate of the Golden Tomb.

He found the pavilion of Wei Chung to to be a *yâmen* of considerable size, an array of ornate buildings enclosed by a wall, the pavilion itself being a palace surrounded by gardens in the center of the enclosure. He was led by one of the horsemen to a low building beside the stables where the hunters were quartered. Entering, after caring for his horse, he found a motley assembly dicing and drinking.

Khlit selected a wooden couch in one corner of the hall where he could see what went on in the building, placing his saddle-bags and coat upon it. Among his companions he identified long-haired Manchus of the North, a few swarthy, fur-clad Tungusi hunters and the remainder squat Solangs of the border provinces. Hillmen and plainsmen, he thought, with few Chinese. Drunk, for the most part, and quarrelsome. He was content, however, to be here and not in the edifices of the Chinese, where spies were to be found.

His entrance had not passed unnoticed. A six-foot Manchu swordsman swaggered over to his couch and surveyed him, arms akimbo.

"Ho, good sirs," bellowed the giant, "a graybeard has fallen into our nest! Nay, look, he wears a full head of hair, unshaven on the forehead. By the sacred magpie, he is a cur among proper men. He will give us good sport! Shall we pluck out his hair or singe his beard?"

Several of the hunters strolled over at this, and gibes flew fast at the unconcerned Cossack. Among men such as these a graybeard was a rare sight, and Khlit belonged to none of the factions present. The drunken idlers welcomed the prospect of entertaining torment at the hand of the Manchu, who, by his size and manner, seemed to be a leader of his faction.

Khlit understood the speech of his persecutor, as the Manchu tongue was similar to the Tatar, but he made no response except to look up. To the Manchu this was a sign of weakness.

"Come, lads," he roared, "we'll singe the hair of his face and head. Ho, then he will be like a raven plucked of its feathers."

"An owl!" put in another gleefully.

"Here is fire!" added a third, handing to the Manchu a smoldering stick pulled from a brazier.

Khlit looked from one to the other. Loud-mouthed scoundrels, he thought, and therefore less dangerous. The Manchu thrust back the sleeves of his embroidered tunic with elaborate pretense and flourished the brand. The onlookers roared with glee at this by-play.

"I have no quarrel with you," growled Khlit, who had grown to dislike combat except where it served his own ends.

"Then I will pick one with you, grandfather of the owls."

Laughter greeted this sally. Attracted by the noise, a short figure in armor-stained

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undercoat of leather thrust through the group, a Manchu with a quiver slung over his shoulder and a guitar, at which he was plucking, under one arm. The newcomer stared at Khlit with a frown, and the Cossack returned his gaze curiously.

"Poor sport for you here, Kurluk," quoth the archer to the tall Manchu. He peered closer at Khlit. "May the devil mate with me! Nay, may I be born again as a woman, and queen of a pest-house, but here is an old friend!"

THE man's voice stirred Khlit's memory. The short, tight-muscled form of the archer also was familiar. The latter, seeing his hesitation, plied the strings of the guitar.

"When sober I feel,
You are both my good friends.
When drunken I reel,
Our good fellowship ends!"

He sang, and recognition flashed into Khlit's eyes. He remembered a certain tower he had once held by good use of his curved saber, assisted by the shafts of the squat archer.

"Arslan!" he responded. "What do you here, minstrel?"

The singer kowtowed solemnly.

"Lord," he laughed, "I follow upon the scent of golden *taels*. Or silver, for that matter. Whoever pays, I am his servant; if he pays well, I am his slave. Here be women of the court in yonder palace who throw a worthy minstrel coins for a melodious song; likewise certain clouds of heaven who are pregnant with gold. As for Wei Chung, being neither man nor woman but a eunuch with a fat purse, I plant my shafts in the gizzards of his enemies."

"When last we met, Arslan," observed Khlit, recalling that the archer had been employing his arrows against the Chinese, "it was otherwise——"

"The dice of fate, lord," broke in Arslan hastily, "fall not always in the same manner. Like a horned ram, a poor mercenary does well not to look behind him——"

"Or to name those whom he met before, Arslan," growled Khlit meaningly, for fear the archer should reveal his identity. Arslan, however, he knew to be a man of wit and counsel, indebted to him for his life. "I, also, am a mercenary without title or honor other than my sword brings. Hey, that is a true word."

"You know this graybeard, Arslan?" put in Kurluk impatiently. "Nay, I shall make him croak like a sick raven. What name bears he?"

The slant eyes of the short archer narrowed shrewdly. Khlit's words had not been wasted.

"He has the surname of the Curved Saber, O light of skull," he laughed. "From that long weapon at his thigh."

"You called him 'lord,'" persisted the other suspiciously.

"Because he is a better fellow than you, Kurluk. Before this life you were an ape. You will be born again as a parrot, undoubtedly. But this old warrior has wisdom under his gray thatch."

Kurlik scowled, resenting Arslan's nimble tongue. The latter, however, he did not choose to antagonize.

"We will burn his roof for him," he muttered, flourishing the brand.

The onlookers guffawed.

Arslan's yellow teeth gleamed.

"Take care you scorch not your own thick fingers, Kurluk of the addle-pate," he retorted.

He had seen Khlit use his curved sword.

"When a heaven-born fool
Uses fire, in his folly,
He will find it a tool
Of dire melancholy."

He chanted, grinning. Kurluk scowled the more and advanced upon Khlit. The Cossack by a quick thrust of his scabbard knocked the burning stick to the floor. Kurluk swore and clapped hand to sword. The watchers drew back, sensing a quarrel. The noisy hunters fell silent, watching the two.

"I have done you no harm, Kurluk," said Khlit mildly, for in his present situation he disliked to attract attention to himself. "Leave the brand in the fire, and we will drink good wine together, you and I."

But the Manchu was not minded to forfeit his sport. His prestige was at stake, and Arslan's taunts had got under his thick skin. He jerked out his short sword savagely.

"Come, dog of the devil," he growled, "I am weary of hearing you bark. Let me see your teeth, if old age has left you any."

With that he spat in the direction of the Cossack, who rose from the couch at once, drawing his weapon. Arslan plucked rapidly at his guitar in high good humor.

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As a rule, a Manchu was well-versed in use of the heavy, hatchet-shaped sword. There were no sturdier fighters among the men of the Dragon banners. But a Cossack is trained from infancy in handling his weapons and is a match for the skilled Osmanli and the best of the dangerous Tatars. His skill is that of one bred to no other purpose.

Khlit's shoulder and arm muscles were lean. He knew that his strength would last only a brief interval against the powerful sword-play of Kurluk. Wherefore he met the rush of his adversary in a manner that brought startled exclamations to the lips of the onlookers and a grin from Arslan. .

Kurluk swung his weapon to beat down Khlit's guard. He found that the other's curved sword pressed against his own before his stroke gathered force. Lash and thrust as he would, the lighter sword formed a glittering guard before his face. When his strokes pierced the guard, the Cossack leaped to one side.

Not only that. Deftly Khlit was thrusting at Kurluk's head. His swift, short strokes cut the skin of the other's shaven head, drawing from one side to the other as a man uses a whetstone against a knife. Blood streamed from the Manchu's skull. Striving desperately to free his sword from the pressure of the other's blade, Kurluk was helpless to stop the deliberate slicing of his forehead.

A moment after the bout had begun, it ended. Kurluk stood cursing, his eyes and ears filled with blood that spattered from his face to the floor. Blinded by it, he was helpless.

"Come, Kurluk," cried Khlit, lowering his sword, "a skilled warrior like you should use his weapon against his enemies. 'Tis a waste of good blood between friends. Let Arslan pour water over your sore head, and we will drink a cup of wine. Truly, it was not by might but by a trick of the sword that I blinded you. So I would have you for a friend."

Kurluk growled irresolutely, rubbing at his smarting eyes.

"Nay, brain of an ox," mocked Arslan, "here is a true man. Sheathe your sword."

The Manchu did so. Thus it was that the Cossack found a friend in a land where he had few friends and many foes. But uppermost in his mind was the regret that the sword-bout had drawn widespread attention to him. He could not longer hope to remain unnoticed among the hunters.

III

On the first day of the seventh moon the beast *chilin* was sighted near the hunting pavilion of the Son of Heaven. Once before had the beast *chilin* been seen, and the omen was auspicious for the hunt. Yet at the same time a dark star was ascendent in the sky at night. How was it to be known which was the true omen, the good or the bad?

Annals of the reign of Wan Li.

IN HIS silk-hung apartment Wan Li moved restlessly, glancing at the water-clock which showed it to be an early hour in the evening. A tall man in middle age with the full girth and broad, placid face of his race. He had discarded his robes of ceremony for a short dragon tunic.

Wan Li was impatient. For a week he had waited at the hunting *yâmen* of Wei Chung-hsien, and as yet there had been no decision from the court of astrologers regarding the omens of the coming hunt. And it was already the seventh moon. A verdict had been promised for that night, and it was already late. He halted impatiently by the two attendants at the door.

"Has Li Yuan F'o asked for admittance yet?" he asked.

One of the men kowtowed.

"May your Majesty live forever! Your servants have not seen the honorable astrologer——"

"Then go," commanded Wan Li, "and say it is my will that he come!"

He seated himself irritably on an ebony bench but looked up eagerly at the appearance of the astrologer. Li Yuan F'o, a venerable savant in ceremonial attire, made the nine obeisances and kneeled. His lined face was troubled.

"Your decision—the omens?" inquired Wan Li quickly.

"Lord of Ten Thousand Years!" began the man. "Your court of astrology has considered the omens with the greatest care, and our divination has been made. As the Son of Heaven in his wisdom knows, the augury of the stars is infallible. The lives of your ancestors of illustrious name have been safeguarded by the celestial omens."

"No one knows better than I, Li Yuan," assented Wan Li respectfully.

"We have used the utmost of our knowledge. The World Honored One must not undertake the hunt. The dark star of evil

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omen is in the ascendency during this moon. It is written that your Majesty must start upon no venture while this star is high in the heavens. That is the verdict of the court of astrology."

Wan Li frowned. Plainly he was not pleased.

"Yet I come here upon a sacred mission. To enter the tomb of my ancestor and burn incense before his coffin. Such an act is sufficient to abolish the evil influence of the star. Have you considered that, Li Yuan?"

The man kowtowed.

"We have considered, Lord of Ten Thousand Years. To open the grave door of the Golden Tomb, wherein no one but the Son of Heaven may come, is a holy act, but the omens are dark. Heed well the words of your faithful servants and close your ears to all others. There are some near you who think first of themselves, then of the Presence——"

Wan Li moved his head impatiently.

"I heed your words of wisdom as an astrologer, Li Yuan. But other advice I judge as I please. You are hostile to Wei Chung-hsien, who has my heart and ear. Is the decision of the astrologers final?"

Li Yuan's stately head bowed.

"It is final, except for divine intervention—such as the appearance of the celestial beast *chilin*, which is always auspicious to your dynasty. Your Majesty must not hunt. The Golden Tomb awaits you."

Both the astrologer and the emperor started at this unfortunate reference to the tomb of the Ming dynasty. Wan Li was impressed as well as disgruntled. He shook his sleeve, dismissing the savant.

"Very well," he muttered. "I had it in my heart to hunt, but, if the omens——"

Li Yuan departed hastily, a triumphant light in his faded eyes. In the outer hall he did not see the eunuch Ch'en Ti-jun step from a hidden door and follow him. Still less did the astrologer guess that this door gave access to a compartment directly behind the silk hangings of Wan Li's chamber. The eunuch laid his hand roughly on the savant's shoulder.

"Treacherous imbecile!" hissed the eunuch. "Is that the way you obey the command of Wei Chung-hsien? After a week's humbug!"

Li Yuan freed himself with dignity.

"The message of the stars," he said gravely, "is not subject to the will of men. I have told his Majesty the truth. Let him be warned by it. I care not for Wei Chung."

"You will think otherwise," assured Ch'en Ti-jun savagely, "if your old fingers are crushed slowly and your brains squeezed until they run through your nose. Go back and tell Wan Li you have reconsidered, or Wei Chung shall deal with you."

"Am I the servant of Wei Chung?" Defiance flashed in the eyes of the astrologer. "Is the Lord of Ten Thousand Years a slave to his own minion? Even if the court has become a hotbed of spies and false tales, forbidden to men of honor? Nay; I serve Wan Li and the stars."

The eunuch smiled.

"Even the decision of the stars, Li Yuan, can be bought by gold. You were witless to refuse Wei Chung's generous offer of rank and gold ingots. Truly, the matter is not important. What harm can come to Wan Li if he hunts?"

"I know not," the astrologer's voice trembled, and his glance fell. "But the stars do not lie. If the matter is so slight, why do you offer me so much to lie?"

Ch'en Ti-jun gnawed his lip; then he passed his long finger-nails softly across the astrologer's thin throat.

"You know what happens to those who disobey Wei Chung? And how useless it is to oppose him? Are you entirely mad?"

Li Yuan's figure, which had fallen to trembling, stiffened.

"I shall be before long," he muttered angrily, "if these rats and foxes who are eunuchs of the court seize what power is left to the emperor. Already they have the command of his armies and the decision as to who shall be admitted to the Presence. They build triumphal arches for themselves, while the Son of Heaven, blind to their sins, goes unhonored. They wear the imperial yellow and forge orders in his name. Now they would control the immutable verdict of the stars——"

Still muttering, the old man moved away from Ch'en Ti-jun, down the passage. The eunuch looked after him, scowling. Then he turned swiftly and halted by the door from which he had come. He paused as if listening, nodding once or twice, as at a command from behind the hangings.

"But if they deny it?" he whispered.

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APPARENTLY the reply satisfied him, for he went to the attendants of the emperor's chamber. Wan Li acknowledged his subservient greeting with a gleam of anticipation. Experience had taught him that the eunuchs were quick to guess his pleasure and minister to it when he was displeased—more so than the hereditary members of his court, who persisted in troubling him with protests and state affairs.

"Lord of Ten Thousand Years," began Ch'en Ti-jun respectfully, "it is the honor of your slave to be the bearer of good tidings. Some members of the court of astrology have disagreed with the ancient Li Yuan. They say he has not interpreted the stars correctly. Your slave brings you their word."

"Is it favorable?"

"World Honored One, it is so. And this is the manner of it. While a certain star of ill omen is in the sky during the seventh moon, there is another star above it."

Wan Li nodded eagerly. The eunuch glanced involuntarily toward one of the silk hangings which swayed as if with a breath of air, although the chamber was closed on all sides.

"It is due to the zealous Wei Chung, whose happiness it is to serve the Son of Heaven, that the good tidings were learned," he continued smoothly. "He has questioned some of the astrologers and discovered this all-important fact. No less a star than that of good omen, your Majesty's birth-star, is now taking the ascendency over the dark orb of ill omen. He does not believe that the venerable Li Yuan knew of this."

"Li Yuan is old," agreed Wan Li eagerly; "he may have made a mistake."

"Doubtless unwittingly. But during the seventh moon, when the birth-star of the Son of Heaven is high, he may undertake a hunt in safety. His happiness is precious to those near the Presence. Excellent game has been sighted in the country between here and the Togra. Everything is prepared. Will your Majesty name the happy day of the opening of the hunt?"

Mingled feelings were reflected in the good-natured face of Wan Li.

"Is it not true," he questioned, "that a birth-star and the one of evil omen together in the sky may mean death?"

Ch'en Ti-jun shook his head with a smile.

"In the case of lesser men, perhaps—and then not always. But there is no power like that of the Dragon planet. Has not the star of your dynasty brought prosperity and long years to you? O Lord of Ten Thousand Years, has the word of the ancient Li Yuan more force than the good omen of your dynasty? Wei Chung-hsien would be grieved if he heard that the Son of Heaven had such a thought."

Wan Li shook his head dubiously. His better judgment told him that in matters of celestial omens the old astrologer would not deceive him. But he had the superstition of his time, and the prospect of the anticipated hunt was alluring. He dismissed Ch'en Ti-jun, unable to make up his mind.

Not more than five minutes after the hangings had fallen behind the eunuch, they parted again and revealed the smiling form of Wei Chung-hsien, clad in resplendent silks, embroidered as was the emperor's tunic with a yellow dragon. The large eyes of the chief eunuch were soft with pleasure as his massive figure made a slight obeisance.

"Glorious tidings for the ear of the Son of Heaven. All breathless, I hasten to bring them, to be the first to whisper the auspicious news. Your divine reign has been blessed by a true sign from heaven. A Manchu huntsman of my employ has sighted a *chilin* near the *yâmen*. The godlike beast that is an omen of celestial goodwill."

Wan Li started and flushed.

"A Manchu huntsman! His name? Bring him to me that I may hear the story from his own lips."

Wei Chung shook his head regretfully.

"The fortunate man," he responded, "is drunk, overcome by his find, and can not come to the Presence."

A last doubt clouded the smooth brow of the emperor.

"How could a Manchu recognize the sacred beast?"

Wei Chung bowed with folded arms.

"O Lord of Ten Thousand Years, do you not see that the wonder is twofold thereby? For he, being of low birth, did not know what he had seen. Only when he described the strange beast to me, did I know of the good fortune of your Majesty. It is proof the man did not lie. As for the hunt——"

"The day after tomorrow," cried Wan Li

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joyfully, "I appoint as the beginning of the hunt. See that all is ready."

FOR a week the huntsmen had been idling in their quarters, and joyfully they received the tidings that night. The hunt was to begin at dawn on the second day. A eunuch of the court brought them the news, and they straightway fell to cleaning weapons and discussing the location of game on the plains beyond the Liao River.

To Khlit and Arslan the announcement brought relief. They had been chafing at the inactivity. Khlit especially found it irksome. He had tried to enter the imperial *yâmen* to satisfy his curiosity concerning the Dragon court. But every gate was guarded by the followers of Wei Chung. Nobles came and went in curtained sedans, surrounded by horsemen.

The atmosphere of the encampment beside the *yâmen*, where the soldiers of the emperor were quartered, was also strange to Khlit. The officers treated him with a contempt which he bore with grim patience. The Chinese men-at-arms were suspicious of his unusual face and figure and avoided him. Their weapons excited his amusement—armored head-pieces and vambraces guarding the arteries, huge quilted coats and two-handed swords, silken garments and black satin boots. The air of secrecy and distrust that pervaded the place was disagreeable to the open-handed Cossack.

Thus he was surprized when a messenger came from the *yâmen* summoning him to the hunting pavilion with Arslan. The archer touched him on the shoulder warningly as they followed their guide into the darkness.

"Silence is best, lord," he whispered. "Where we are going, the curtains have ears. If any ask, remember that you are one of the stout fellows sent for by Wei Chung from the plains. Kurluk and I are among them. None will know that you were not summoned with the rest."

Khlit grunted understanding. They were admitted by the sentinels at the gate and turned into a narrow passage that brought them to some stairs leading to the floor above. Here the floors were carpeted with costly Persian rugs, and the walls shone with lacquer and enamel. The scent of dried flowers was in the air.

A slender girl peered out at them from a curtain, which was drawn aside, and they stood in a dimly-lit chamber where the walls were veiled in shadows cast by a red-paper lantern overhead. Their guide had disappeared, but a squat eunuch took his place. Khlit felt that they were being carefully inspected by unseen eyes.

Presently he saw the eunuch kowtow and Arslan follow suit. Then he was aware that a woman had entered the room and was seated on a couch in front of them. In spite of the warning hiss of the eunuch, the Cossack scanned the shadowy figure.

He saw a slender form, erect, in a black silk dress, gold embroidered, with a yellow crêpe veil framing a delicate face. The tiny red lips were brilliant with paint; the dark eyes inscrutable. She was speaking in a low voice. Later Arslan interpreted what she had said.

They had been granted an audience by the Lady Li, favorite of the emperor.

She had heard, she said, that they were the leaders of the huntsmen who were to find game for the Son of Heaven. During the chase they would keep near the imperial sedan, pointing out the places where the finest animals were to be found. Such was the custom.

Before the chase began, said the Lady Li, the Son of Heaven would go to the tomb of his ancestor, a few hours' ride into the plain from the *yâmen*. There he would enter the grave chamber to burn incense and offer prayer, as was permitted once in ten years to the Ming monarchs. This duty performed, Wan Li would go to his sedan. Then the signal would be given for the beaters to begin their casts into the plains, and the hunt would go forward.

The departure from the *yâmen* would be after midnight so that the emperor would leave the Golden Tomb at dawn—such was his impatience to begin the excursion into the plains.

From the moment they left the *yâmen*, said the Lady Li, it was her wish that the worthy hunstmen, comrades of Khlit and Arslan, should ride close to the imperial chair. Darkness, she hinted, was a screen for the working of evil by traitors, of whom there were many in the court. The huntsmen could be relied on to be faithful to their salt. They must see to it that the emperor was not molested during the confusion of the hunt. Especially when the chase

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pushed into the rocky regions in the distant plains where ambuscades were possible.

The huntsmen must never leave the chair of the emperor.

This was the word of the Lady Li of the shell-tinted face and the dark eyes. At a signal from the eunuch Arslan and Khlit took their departure, walking backward. A light rain was falling without, and the archer drew the Cossack into a group of cherry-trees beside the pavilion gate while he told him the woman's message.

"HEY, old warrior," he chuckled, "you and I have been blessed with a rare sight, the face of the beautiful courtesan whose dainty hand upraised could slit the gullets of a thousand men if it pleased her. We shall have a fat purse of *taels* for this night's work. Nay, I marvel that she trusts us."

Khlit shook his head moodily.

"Think, you so, Arslan? Why should she put faith in us? Are the words of such a woman to be believed?"

"She spoke us fairly. We are to watch over the emperor's person. Doubtless she has heard the tale of your sword-play with Kurluk. It may be she suspects evil of the fat Wei Chung."

"In whose pay you are."

"True. But the more masters, the more gold. The Lady Li has promised us costly emeralds and sapphires for doing her bidding. Wei Chung has not ordered otherwise."

Khlit stared at the lantern over the postern thoughtfully.

"It is said the Lady Li has a son. Is it true?"

"So the tale runs. A year ago the Lady Li announced that a son had been born, and the emperor burned incense before her tablet out of pure joy. Some said an infant had been smuggled into the woman's palace that night, but doubtless they were sliced in quarters for that calumny. Wan Li favors the child above his lawful heir, who has the support of the older nobles. There be rumors that Wan Li has signed a decree naming the son of Lady Li as his successor. I know not. In the Dragon court a decree is often a forgery at the hands of these foxes of eunuchs."

"Evil follows the destiny of a ruler who gives power to servants."

Arslan stared at his companion curiously. Khlit's keen insight into what went on about him was something of a mystery to the light-minded archer.

"You speak as one who knows the celestial omens, lord," he muttered.

The Cossack did not smile.

"Have you forgotten, Arslan," he responded, "that I have been, for a time, a leader of men?"

"Nay, I have not forgotten, Khlit. Nor that you once saved my life. Wherefore, I am your man, and your will is mine. Your peril is my peril. But why have you come to this nest of evil?"

This question had often troubled Arslan. Khlit did not reply at once.

"It is in my blood to wander, Arslan," he growled. "Why does a goshawk fly up into the sun? I have come to see the face of the Dragon Emperor, Lord of a Hundred Million Souls. When I have done so, I will be content."

Arslan shook his dark head dubiously. Why should a man risk his skin in such a profitless venture?

"I have a thought," mused Khlit, "that, if Wan Li died and the decree of which you speak could be produced, the Lady Li might claim the throne for her child. As the boy is an infant, she would then be empress-dowager, in possession of the Dragon throne."

The archer caught his arm hastily.

"Those words would earn us molten silver down our gullets, Khlit," he warned, anxiously. "Nay, you know not the power of the older nobles. If the Lady Li should be guilty of such a crime, all her influence at court would not save her life."

"Not if she were allied to Wei Chung?"

"The chief eunuch is his own master, Khlit. Nay, the slayer of Wan Li would be snuffed out like a candle in the wind, if he were the all-powerful eunuch himself."

"Wan Li might die by accident."

"Does the sun become dark by chance? To think that is madness."

The archer broke off, pointing to the postern. A sedan-chair had drawn up at the gate. The two watchers saw a robed figure descend from it hastily.

"That is the astrologer, Li Yuan," whispered Arslan, peering out between the tree trunks.

Khlit saw the face of the old man in the lantern light as he spoke to the guards. Li Yuan F'o seemed strongly agitated as he

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begged admittance. The attendants barred his passage.

"The old star-gazer is wroth," interpreted Arslan, who had caught the raised voices of the trio. "He asks why a noble of the court is barred from the presence of the emperor."

"What say the guards?"

"The Son of Heaven is asleep and must not be disturbed."

Li Yuan seemed to be protesting violently. He tried to push between the guards and was thrust back by their spears. Beating his forehead with clenched fists, he returned to his chair, which was borne off in the darkness by the bearers.

No sooner had he disappeared than the bulky figure of Wei Chung came to the doorway from within. The chief eunuch muttered something to the two guards, who seized their spears and ran after the sedan. Then Wei Chung retreated into the building.

To Arslan's horror Khlit emerged from the trees and sought the door, now empty of attendants. The archer followed unwillingly in time to see the tall Cossack peer up the stairs after the figure of the chief eunuch.

Not content with this, Khlit, motioning the archer to silence, slipped up the stairway. Looking into the silken hall, he saw Wei Chung vanish into the chamber where they had left the Lady Li. Arslan heard a moment later the shrill laugh of a woman.

"If we are found here," he whispered fearfully, "we shall be meat for the hunting-dogs on the morrow——"

This time Khlit accompanied Arslan to the door and out into the rain. His face was moody, and he did not speak until they regained the hunters' quarters.

"A woman and a eunuch," he said, "and well pleased."

The next day Arslan reported that an imperial decree had ordered Li Yuan and the other astrologers from the grounds of the hunting pavilion. The name signed to the decree was that of Wei Chung.

IT IS written in the annals of Wan Li, of the Ming dynasty, that on the day before the hunt of the seventh moon, his Majesty out of generous goodwill toward his subjects ordained that a puppet-show be given in the courtyard of the pavilion for the hunters. In the halls by the stables Arslan greeted the announcement of the servant with a loud shout of approval, while his black eyes snapped with excitement.

"Ho, brothers," he cried, "here will be merry music of fiddles and rare wine for the men of the chase. Let us go at once and seize the benches before the puppet-cage!"

His words were greeted by an answering shout from the idlers, whose interest was lightly stirred. The Manchus and plainsmen, Khlit among them, were early on the scene. They found the fruit-garden of the pavilion surrounded by eunuchs with drawn swords and the gates of the building itself heavily guarded by armed soldiery. But their anticipation was aroused by sight of a painted wooden structure among the trees in the courtyard.

The puppet-stage was curtained on three sides, the fourth presenting a miniature stage to the audience. Swaying of the draperies suggested to the eager audience of soldiers, huntsmen, and servants that the puppets were already in preparation for the show. Musicians tuned up squeaky fiddles at one side of the edifice. An imposingly garbed mandarin stood before the stage, ready to interpret the actions of the play. Wine was not lacking.

Wan Li had given especial orders that his huntsmen were to be well entertained. He himself deigned to appear behind the lattice screens of the pavilion balcony overlooking the court. Wei Chung and the Lady Li with her attendants were the only ones with him, for, since his decision to hold the hunt, the emperor had dismissed the nobles, who plagued him with matters of state, back to Peking. He sat expectantly on a couch, as eager as his servants for the play to begin.

At a signal from the mandarin by the stage the huntsmen arose and kowtowed respectfully in the direction of the concealed monarch.

"These worthies of the chase, sire," bowed Wei Chung, "express their hopes for a great kill of antelope, deer, tigers and the splendid wild camels for the morrow. They rejoice with the Presence in the good omen of the *chilin*."

Wan Li was still disappointed that he could not speak with the man who had sighted the legendary beast called the *chilin*—that left no footprint and conversed with human beings in their own tongue. He half hoped, however, aided by the

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flatteries of the eunuchs, that the *chilin* of good omen would be found in the hunt.

In the courtyard below the hunters were astir, for the mandarin had begun his chanting recital of the play, and the fiddles were sounding. Arslan listened with a critical ear and nudged Khlit.

"Harken, old warrior," he whispered, "the play will be about the coming visit of Wan Li to the grave of his ancestor."

Khlit looked up indifferently.

"Nay, we are like penned beasts, Arslan, guarded by drawn weapons. Since when have men been herded as animals?"

The archer motioned him impatiently to silence.

"Yon minstrel of the long robe chants," he explained, "how the tomb is watched night and day by chosen warriors of the Son of Heaven, for within it by the body of the illustrious dead man is a treasure beyond price. Harken—gold inlaid in enamel jars, and eternal candles that burn for ten years on pedestals of jade, also pearls and rubies of the rarest and golden vessels. Small wonder it is called the Golden Tomb."

A puppet garbed in the imperial yellow appeared on the stage, manipulated by the hands of the men behind the edifice. It bowed before a candle and a black box, purporting to be the tomb, while the voice of the mandarin chanted on and the fiddles struck up a rude tune. Then a form with a gray beard descended from the ceiling of the stage and bent over the kneeling monarch.

"See," commented Arslan, "it is the dead emperor's spirit come from the ten courts of purgatory. No one but a Son of Heaven can set foot in the tomb. Even he does not approach the coffin but stands in the grave chamber. A pity such glorious riches should be buried. Only once in ten years are they seen. Ho, I see singing girls coming from the pavilion entrance!"

Khlit took no heed of what was happening. His thoughts were occupied by the request of the Lady Li that they guard the emperor during the hunt. Why had the favorite of Wan Li chosen them for this important post? Because she distrusted the usual guards? But these were the men of Wei Chung. And the Lady Li appeared on the best of terms with the chief eunuch.

Why had the old astrologer, Li Yuan, been kept from the emperor the previous night? Because the guards of Wei Chung were unwilling for him to deliver his message. What did the eunuch hope to gain from the hunt? Khlit did not know.

Memories of various things he had seen during his stay at the *yâmen* flocked upon him. Why had the veteran Ming generals of the Chinese army who had come with Wan Li been sent back to Peking on one pretext or another?

And why had Wei Chung sent out to the plains and the Northern provinces for Arslan and Kurluk and their comrades? The Lady Li had spoken truly when she said that the huntsmen, who had no interest other than their own skins, would be trustworthy guards of the imperial sedan. And, undoubtedly, they knew the whereabouts of game and could show Wan Li the best sport. Perhaps, after all, Wei Chung only hoped to make the chase a success.

Still Khlit was not altogether satisfied. His keen eyes had searched the faces of those in the *yâmen*, and he had been powerless to read the thoughts behind the inscrutable, slant eyes, but he had read deceit and consummate cunning of a kind strange to him.

He looked up as the puppets disappeared and a murmur from the huntsmen greeted the coming of the singing girls—delicate and fancifully-garbed damsels, who postured gracefully, swaying their supple bodies and chanting a shrill, melodious tune echoed by the fiddles. Arslan grinned with delight. Then, when the festival was almost at an end, one of the girls ran from the group and flung herself on her knees before the gallery where the emperor sat.

She stretched her slim arms upward imploringly, and Khlit, who was near, saw that her cheeks were blanched under their coating of red.

"Harken, Lord of Ten Thousand Years," she screamed shrilly, "to a low servant of your beneficence! Heed my message. Because it is a word from the dead for the ear of the Son of Heaven."

Sheer surprize silenced those around her. The singing ceased, and the fiddles broke off their tune. A movement behind the lattice showed that she was observed.

"Harken to a message from the unlawfully slain! Go not on the hunt at midnight. Your Majesty has been tricked with lies. The men of wisdom, who would have advised the Dragon faithfully, were sent away by forged decrees. Where are the

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generals of your army? They are dismissed. Only eunuchs and their followers remain. The story of the auspicious beast *chilin* was false, to delude the Son of Heaven. My father, the lowly Chang, was slain at his door because he voiced his suspicions——"

A heavy hand caught the daring girl by the hair and flung her to the earth. The high voice of Wei Chung rang out from behind the lattice.

"A knife for the mad wench! Her wails disturb the Son of Heaven."

The tall form of Ch'en Ti-jun strode to the side of the prostrate girl. Khlit saw him seize a sword and slash the unfortunate woman savagely. When the sword was running red, the eunuch tossed it aside and kicked the quivering form. The assembled hunters were hustled from the enclosure by the eunuchs.

In the balcony Wan Li had risen with a frown.

"Are you the emperor, Wei Chung?" he demanded, "to have power of life and death?"

The chief eunuch bowed his head abjectly, with a scornful look Wan Li did not see.

"If your servant has offended, may his head fall from his shoulders. I did but speak hastily, fearing lest your Majesty's peace be irked by the prating girl. For what is the life of such to the enjoyment of the kingly hunt that begins tonight?"

Wan Li surveyed him, hesitation mirrored in his good-natured face. The beautiful favorite stepped to his side.

"Lord of my life," she whispered, "I also have offended. It was I who slew the scurrilous Chang because he dared to breathe tales against my name. His madness has affected his child——"

"I forgive you," said Wan Li.

The courtyard was nearly deserted when Khlit and Arslan turned to go. To the archer's dismay Khlit picked up the body of the girl and strode off with it to the gate.

"Have you love of the bow-string necklace?" whispered Arslan hurriedly. "Nay, the child is accursed now. Even while Ch'en Ti-jun was striking her, she cried that there was a conspiracy against Wan Li and that those who honored him should not leave his side in the hunt——"

But Khlit shook his head.

"Dog!" he growled. "This is the body of a young girl. Would you leave it to be defiled? Nay; we will give it to a priest."

For all his protest the archer did not leave Khlit until the Cossack had seen to the burial of the slain girl at one of the temples. Then he followed as Khlit strode back to their quarters with moody brow.

"Truly, this is not such a great matter—a singing girl slain," quoth Arslan.

"It is devil's work."

Khlit swung around and grasped his companion's arm. Drawing the Turkish pistol at his belt, he thrust it into his hand.

"Will you serve me, Arslan?"

"My will is your will. Aye, that I shall do."

"Then seek out your horse. Say that you go on business of the hunt. Bear this weapon as a token from me to the Togra. You know Dokadur Khan?"

"The Khirghiz bandit? Aye."

"Bid him, if he values his life, assemble his men. Say to him that I, Khlit of the Curved Saber, sent you. Say that there may be rich spoil for the taking. But he must be watchful. Post sentries at the entrances of the Togra ravines. I will join you there tomorrow."

Arslan's eyes widened in surprize.

"But the hunt—who will guide the emperor?"

"I will—with Kurluk and some of the Manchus." Khlit's gray mustache twitched in a smile. "The hunt? Nay; it has begun. But other game is sought than antelope or tiger."

IV

The spirits of the everlasting dead have ascended on the Dragon. But in the tombs, hallowed by a thousand years, they are to be found. Humbly must the visitor come to the tombs.

For the mightiest emperor is a child before the faces of the invisible dead.

Li Yuan F'o, astrologer of the court.

IN THE plains beyond the Liao River the Golden Tomb had been built by one of the early Ming emperors. To guard against discovery, a half dozen tomb mounds were constructed of which only one was used. There was no visible monument, except the high mound of earth rising among some low, pine-clad hills.

In accordance with immemorial custom, an armed guard was stationed in the hills,

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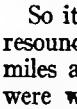
a guard called the *kang leen* or watchmen at night. The captain of these picked soldiers himself did not know the location of the true grave—a precaution made necessary by the treasures housed within. But on the night of the seventh moon, when the hunt of Wan Li began, a confidential messenger came to the guard from the court bearing an order sealed by the ring at the emperor's girdle, commanding the captain to unearth the doorway of a certain tomb, buried underground.

So it was that, when the midnight gongs resounded in the *yâmen* of Wan Li, fifteen miles away in the plains, Chinese soldiers were working by moon and torchlight to uncover the stone door of the Golden Tomb. Under the pines they worked hastily, for the emperor was coming, and being alone in the hills they were gripped by fear of the dead man beneath the earth.



WAN LI entered his waiting sedan-chair with a light heart as the drums and gongs struck midnight. From the latticed gallery the Lady Li with her women watched his stately figure escorted through the courtyard, illumined by a hundred torches in the hands of mounted attendants.

A roll of drums announced to the waiting soldiery that the chair of the emperor was in motion. In front of it went a troop of armor-clad horsemen, under command of Ch'en Ti-jun. The sedan-chair of Wei Chung followed that of Wan Li. The quick glance of the Lady Li noted that the eunuch's chair was blazoned with the imperial dragon and possessed the same number of bearers as that of Wan Li. To all intents the two were alike, such was the presumption of the chief eunuch who had drawn to himself nearly all of the imperial power.

The lips of the dark-eyed favorite curled scornfully as she noted this proof of Wei Chung's arrogance, passed over by Wan Li. Truly, Wan Li was blind, she thought. A man enslaved by pleasures, bound by his own weak will. Her glance fell upon the group of fur-coated huntsmen riding on either side of the imperial chair, led by the tall rider whom she had heard called the Curved Saber.

Behind the emperor's cortège came an array of courtiers, robed for the chase, and such of the lesser nobles as Wei Chung had allowed to remain at the pavilion. Without the courtyard were waiting the ranks of soldiers and beaters who were to make a wide cast through the plains, hemming in the game to be killed in the presence of the emperor.

When the last torches of the cavalcade had vanished toward the plains, the Lady Li went to the chamber where she was accustomed to burn incense before the tablet of Wan Li. Instead of doing so, however, she locked the door and sank upon a couch, pressing her dainty hands against her temples, staring at a long candle, marked off at regular intervals to tell the passing of the hours.

Once clear of the pavilion, the imperial cortège fell into a swift trot, the sedan-bearers keeping up easily with the horsemen. On either flank the troops of soldiery spread out, their torches marking a line several miles from end to end. The huntsmen accompanying Wan Li kept their place in the procession silently. Their task would not begin until the ceremony at the Golden Tomb was completed.

Khlit rode at their head within a few yards of Wan Li's sedan. The emperor, he noted, kept himself hidden in the screened depths of the chair. Beside him rode the swaggering Kurluk, who had taken Arslan's place.

Khlit's thoughts were busy as he rode. Chiefly he wondered concerning the singing girl who had sacrificed her life to warn Wan Li against venturing on the chase. She must have known the danger she courted by her rash speech. Arslan had heard her speak of a conspiracy, even under the mortal blows of Ch'en Ti-jun. But he could see no evidence of a plot against Wan Li.

True, the emperor's immediate followers were all eunuchs, or nobles under the influence of Wei Chung. Yet he knew the main body of the soldiery would not countenance any violence to the person of Wan Li, sacred by the traditions of fifty generations. A weapon lifted against Wan Li would mean the death of the offender.

He believed that the Lady Li and the chief eunuch had joined forces. Both were interested in breaking the power of the emperor in order to install the favorite's child on the Dragon throne. With Wan Li out of the way, this might be done. But how was the way to be cleared?

Khlit did not know. Were all his

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suspicions groundless? It seemed so. But the old Cossack was wise in the ways of evil, and he smelled treachery as keenly as he scented the damp night air.

Another thing that gave him food for thought was the treatment he and the Manchu mercenaries had received. Wan Li had given orders that the huntsmen should be honored. But was this the only reason that he and Arslan had been unmolested, although both must have earned the enmity of the all-powerful eunuchs?

They had been given a position of trust. And it was because Khlit's shrewd mind had guessed at the reason that he sent Arslan to Dokadur Khan. If what he suspected came to pass, he and his friends would have need of aid, even from the bandits of the Togra.

Truly, thought Khlit, this would be a strange hunt. One where the hunters were silken-robed and inscrutable of eye, and where the lives of men counted as less than those of the beasts they sought.

He kept a keen lookout during the ride, but nothing occurred until they came to the pine hills that sheltered the tombs.

Here the soldiery on the flanks came to a halt, and the emperor's cavalcade went forward alone under the pines. A few minutes' trot, and they met the sentinels of the *kang leen* who accompanied them to the unearthed entrance to the tomb. The sedan-chairs of Wan Li and Wei Chung were deposited near the excavation. Khlit and the huntsmen dismounted and pressed forward curiously.

The torches of the *kang leen* lighted the place fitfully. Khlit saw that the courtiers and nobles remained at a distance in a semicircle about the entrance. A flight of stone steps led down to what appeared to be a stone slab in the form of a door.

Wan Li had emerged from his chair, when he was approached by Wei Chung who escorted him to the tomb. Khlit was anxious to gain a better view of the Lord of Ten Thousand Years and made his way close to the entrance, in time to see his face clearly as he descended the steps and vanished in the shadows of the tomb.

Wei Chung was busied in arranging guards between the sedans and the gate. In doing so, the eunuch failed to notice Khlit, half-hidden in the shadows by the piles of freshly-dug earth. The other huntsmen had returned to their horses. Khlit was about to do likewise, when he hesitated.

A sudden thought struck the Cossack. He was but a step from the sunken gate, and unobserved. It might be possible for him to slip into the tomb after the emperor. The risk would be great. But the Golden Tomb was a prize worth seeing.

Khlit did not waste a second thought on his venture. Bending low, he scrambled down the freshly-dug earth to the foot of the stairs. The huge stone gate was ajar, sixty feet below the earth's surface. It led into a passage built up with teakwood pillars, the ceiling supported by beams of the same wood, fifty feet above the Cossack's head. Some distance ahead of him light came through a door similar to the one he had entered. A glance showed Khlit the grave tunnel was empty as far as the further portal, and he walked forward quietly.

Midway he hesitated. He had heard a step on the stair behind him.

THE sound caused the blood to quicken in Khlit's veins. The light ahead of him was faint, and, looking over his shoulder, he could see nothing in the shadows of the stairway. A moment he waited, then turned, reassured. No one had appeared in the grave tunnel. He remembered that the place was forbidden to all the Chinese except those of imperial blood.

He had little fear of being followed. And to the best of his knowledge no one had seen him enter the mausoleum. Ahead of him, Wan Li would be engaged in his devotions. Khlit made his way to the second door and looked within.

Unlike the first stone gate, the second portal swung on cleverly contrived hinges, making it possible for one man to open it. The hall that Khlit now saw was the grave antechamber, built of jade slabs and empty of ornament. In the center knelt the emperor.

Wan Li's back was toward the Cossack. He held a bronze bowl in which incense smoldered, sending thin spirals of smoke toward the ceiling. His face was toward the third chamber, which was the tomb, visible through half-drawn curtains of yellow silk, gold embroidered.

In a low undertone Wan Li was repeating a prayer, bending his massive back over the bowl. The glow from the grave illumined

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the dragon emblazoned on his robe. Beyond him Khlit saw the stone slab bearing the coffin of the Ming emperor. On either side of the slab were ranged sacrificial vessels of gold, emblems and ornaments of gold, studded with jewels.

The jewels reflected, with a hundred brilliant eyes, the light from the everlasting candles. These were huge masses of walrus fat, ascending in a pyramid, half-way to the ceiling. Khlit understood now why they were said to burn for ten years at a time beside the coffin.

Wan Li laid the bowl on the floor and touched his forehead to the stone. Silence reigned in the tomb. Khlit's gaze was fixed unblinkingly on the treasure of the grave chamber. The panoply of death meant nothing to him. The thought came to him that all this gold beside the dry bones of a dead man was like the dragon robe of the living Wan Li—the trappings of immortality decked about a human frame.

Khlit looked at Wan Li and smiled. A weak creature wielding the power of other men's making—a man ruled by women and courtiers, obedient to the words of astrologers. Was this the ruler of a hundred million?

Wan Li was praying again. Echoes in the rear chambers caught the murmur of his voice and whispered it back to Khlit. In spite of his scorn, the Cossack comprehended something of the spirit which had brought Wan Li to the tomb, the faithfulness to the memory of those who had worn the dragon robe before him. The link which bound Wan Li to the dead.

The emperor rose to his feet, and Khlit stepped back from the stone gate. He walked swiftly to the outer door and slipped through it as a sound behind him told him that Wan Li had closed the portal of the grave chamber.

The outer tunnel was now in darkness, and Khlit was forced to feel his way forward by the teakwood pillars. He went swiftly, not wishing to be observed by the man behind him. From the massive entrance gate he passed to the stairs, halting in the shadows at one side of the excavation.

It would be dangerous for him to walk out into the torchlight before the emperor came out. He reasoned swiftly that Wan Li would summon his men to help close the stone door. Then Khlit might make his appearance without exciting curiosity.

As he had thought, it happened. A resounding blow on the door by the man behind him brought Wei Chung with a dozen of the *kang leen* running to the stairs. As the dragon-robed figure passed up the steps within arm's reach of the Cossack, Wei Chung and his followers swung-to the door.

The gate thudded into place, and the fastenings were secured. Khlit joined the men, who retraced their steps as the task was performed. He was in time to gain his horse, held by Kurluk, and trot to where his men were waiting before the imperial cortège was in motion.

Surely, thought Khlit, Wan Li's mind had been fixed too long upon the dead, for his face was stony and drawn as that of a man who has seen his own grave.

He saw Wei Chung assist the imperial passenger into the sedan and lean within, as if to adjust the cushions, before he closed the door. Then the chief eunuch motioned to the courtiers; the drums sounded, and the chair-bearers broke into a trot. Khlit brought his men to their previous position, abreast the imperial sedan. They passed swiftly through the pines and out to the plains. The *kang leen* remained behind to guard the tomb.

It was near the hour of dawn. A fresh wind had sprung up in their faces, causing the torches of the cavalcade to flicker and the silk trappings of the sedan to rustle. The stars were dimmer overhead, and the spears of the horsemen who rode in the rear were outlined against the scarlet glow of sunrise in the east.

The huntsmen about Khlit were crying to each other, cheerful with the prospect of the coming hunt. Ch'en Ti-jun reined back his horse until he was within ear-shot of Khlit.

"Ride closer to the emperor's chair," he cried softly. "Remember the warning of the Lady Li."

Khlit made no response. The attending eunuchs and courtiers were a bow-shot length away; the soldiery even further. Only the hard-worked bearers and a half-dozen linkmen were between the huntsmen and the chair. There was no sign of any danger. Nevertheless, Khlit did as he was instructed.

The closer formation moved the Cossack slightly ahead of Wan Li's chair. His men formed a ring about it. He heard a

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sudden exclamation from one of the riders and turned.

A glance showed him what had happened. One of the torch-bearers, pressed closer to the sedan by the huntsmen, had allowed his brand to touch the side of the chair. Instantly the dry sandalwood lattice-work and the silk trappings caught. A cry of horror broke from the bearers.

THE flame crackled in the high wind. It licked up the side to the roof of the chair. The shout of the bearers was echoed by the nobles who had sighted the fire.

"Treachery!" screamed Wei Chung, leaping from his sedan. "The dogs have attacked the emperor!"

"Slay them," shrilled Ch'en Ti-jun, striking at the nearest of the huntsmen. "Save Wan Li."

The man within the chair could not have seen the flames. The bearers, plainly paralyzed by fear, had let their burden fall to earth. One of the Manchu riders, endeavoring to wrap his cloak about the flaming wood, was struck in the face by an arrow launched toward the group. Kurluk beat at the mounting fire with his heavy hat, only to be almost unhorsed by the rush of Ch'en Ti-jun.

Khlit had wheeled his mount into the group. But by now the fire had caught about the door and roof of the sedan. The wind quickened its progress.

"To the emperor!" Wei Chung was shouting. "Treachery!"

"Aid for Wan Li!" screamed the nobles, charging into the dancing horses of the hunters.

Swords gleamed in the glow from the flames. Khlit saw that the huntsmen, surprized and surrounded, were being cut down. The Chinese appeared blinded by their excitement. Yet the Cossack noticed that their efforts were devoted as much to killing the riders as to quenching the fire that was consuming the remnants of Wan Li's chair.

By now it was impossible that the man within the imperial chair could be saved.

The lattice door had swung inward, its fastenings loosened by the flames. Khlit had a fleeting glimpse of a ghastly, round face and wide, staring eyes. Already the face was blackened by heat, and the dragon robe was shriveling.

What he saw made Khlit rein in his horse and wheel away from the chair.

"This way!" he cried above the tumult. "Kurluk, men of the hunt!"

Several of the riders heard him and spurred toward him. The giant Kurluk, however, was hemmed in by the Chinese, using his sword valiantly. Some nobles were beating at the flaming chair with their cloaks, but the eunuchs seemed intent on cutting down the riders who had been escorting the sedan.

Khlit rose in his stirrups after the fashion of the Cossacks and led his few followers into the group around Kurluk. The giant Manchu saw them coming and beat himself free from his antagonists, who quailed from his heavy sword.

Another moment and he had gained Khlit's side, cursing, his face streaked with blood.

"The devil himself set fire to Wan Li," he panted. "By my father's grave, it was no work of ours——"

Ch'en Ti-jun rode up to the Manchu, his seamed countenance alight with evil triumph. The eunuch pointed a pistol at Kurluk's shaggy head and fired. Khlit saw his friend sway in the saddle, eyes closed and chin on breast. Then he slid to the ground.

"Ride," shouted the Cossack to his remaining men, "or you are dead men!"

From three quarters the Chinese were closing in on them. But ahead of them a way was clear to the plains. Through the opening Khlit and his handful of hunters spurred, cutting down the few who tried to head them off. Cries and shots pursued them.

They were now free of the Chinese and settled down into a fast gallop, hugging their saddles to avoid the pistol-shots. A motley troop of soldiery galloped after them. But the huntsmen were well-mounted. Led by Khlit, they slowly widened the gap between them and their pursuers.

"Ho, comrade," snarled a bearded fellow close to the Cossack, "the accident to Wan Li will cost us dear. The Son of Heaven is burned to a crisp."

Khlit eased himself in his saddle, with a hard laugh.

"Have you lost your wits?" he demanded. "That was no accident."

"Be that as it may," growled the other, "we are dead men. Aye, dead by the

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rarest tortures known to those devils behind us. They will hunt us down like cornered antelope."

"Aye," muttered another, "there is no hope for us."

Khlit was silent, thinking grimly of the false words of the Lady Li. Truly, they had been trapped. The Chinese courtiers and soldiers, as well as the eunuchs, had seen the flames break out on Wan Li's chair in the midst of the hunters. The torch-bearer who had been responsible for the mishap was undoubtedly slain. Those of the sedan-bearers who lived would testify against the hunters to save their own skins.

He had suspected that they would be used in some such manner by the scheming eunuchs. But the swiftness of the catastrophe had surprized him. Wei Chung had planned well. There was no proof that the affair had not been an accident.

"Silence your loose tongues," he growled over his shoulder, "and you will yet save your skins."

In the plains ahead of him the dawn showed the rocky ridges of the Togra, still veiled in the distance by morning mists.

ARSLAN had ridden very rapidly to the Togra, for Khlit's words had been urgent. When he came to the first of the rocky defiles, the Manchu drew rein and halted his beast with a calculating glance of his black eyes over the heights in front of him. The midafternoon sun shone full in his tanned face. There was no sign of watchers in the defiles, but Arslan knew that the men of Dokadur Khan could not be far off. It was the season of the hunt, and at such times the riders of the Togra were accustomed to come forth from their haunts.

The experienced archer had no wish to be taken for a scout of the imperial forces, as might readily happen. So he slung his bow over his back, adjusted the quiver carelessly at his left hip and displayed his guitar ostentatiously. By these signs he hoped to make plain that his mission was one of peace. To leave no doubt in the mind of those watching him from the heights, he rode forward slowly, to all intents heedless of where he went.

His strategy had its reward, for, instead of a match-lock ball or an arrow in his back, he was accosted by a dark-faced Khirghiz, exceedingly well-mounted. In response to the other's questions, Arslan stated that his mission was to see Dokadur Khan; that it was imperative; that he was alone and without intention of spying on the men of the Togra. Only half satisfied, the Khirghiz bade him accompany him, and they presently came out into a large gorge in which some hundred men were dismounted about fires.

Here his guide left him, and it was only after a long delay that the man returned, accompanied by the broad figure of Dokadur Khan, whom Arslan easily recognized by the missing ear. The Togra chieftan inspected his visitor narrowly.

"What is your message, Manchu?" he growled.

Arslan, who had dismounted, returned the other's somber stare thoughtfully, his small head cocked to one side.

"In the last moon, Dokadur Khan," he began — Khlit had told him as much— "you had a guest at your yurt in the Togra, a gray-haired rider who was not Tatar nor Manchu."

"I remember. What of him?"

"He sends a message by me. Also a token. Do you recognize this, also?"

Arslan drew the chased Turkish pistol from his belt, being careful to handle it inoffensively, for the men of the Togra being outcasts were quick to suspect evil. Dokadur Khan's eyes lighted as they fell upon the weapon, perceiving that it was one he had coveted. He was now the owner of the brace, for the other reposed in his own belt. He accepted it without acknowledgment.

"And the message?" he asked again.

"Was one of pressing importance. The hunt of Wan Li has begun. The man who sent me bids you sharpen your eyes and ears and watch well from the Togra, or the Chinese swords will slit your jaws from your gullets."

"Does a goshawk need warning to watch its quarry?" snarled the chieftain. "You ride hard to say very little."

Arslan held up his hand as a sign he had further tidings. Khlit had had time to tell him few things that were in the Cossack's mind. But Arslan knew that Khlit would not send him on a venture that was not necessary, supremely so. There was no telling if Dokadur Khan was professedly loyal or not to the Chinese, for the moment.

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"Heed this well, Dokadur Khan," he said impressively. "There will be taking of spoil before many suns. He who sent me, knowing this and trusting in the skill of the men of the Togra, will offer you a share in what is to happen."

The Khirghiz threw back his broad head with a growling laugh.

"Nay, small of wit! Does a man offer share in the spoil he has taken, if not from weakess. Has this old man of yours a tribe of horsemen? Nay, he is alone. How then can he take spoil? And where is it to be found?"

Arslan considered. Khlit had told him that they would have need of refuge in the Togra. And to bid Dokadur Khan be prepared with his men when he came to meet them. More than this he did not say. Arslan himself was curious as to why Khlit would come to the Togra; also, what he had meant by speaking of the hunt that had already begun. It would not do to promise anything, or the Khirghiz would suspect.

"There be matters, Dokadur Khan," he suggested, "that are best managed by one man alone. Where the stake is highest, a few players gain the best reward. Such a matter is this. The man who sent me has eaten at your fireside, and he has judged that you are one who may serve him. The honor is high."

"Nay, am I a jackal to feed from other's offal? In the Togra I am master."

"Be it so. You are a free man. You need not come to meet the one who sent me, if it pleases you not. Yet Khlit said you would be of service."

Arslan turned toward his horse indifferently. The Khirghiz halted him with an exclamation.

"Is this man Khlit of the Curved Saber? He who was master of the Jun-gar?"

"And of many others. Yet you need not join with him in this matter. The Khan Khlit deals with higher stakes than horseflesh or the plucking of a scurvy caravan. I will tell him that you will not see him."

Arslan made as if to mount. In his interest at the news he had just learned, Dokadur Khan went so far as to lay hand on his shoulder. The archer swung around with a scowl, hand at sword.

"Stay!" muttered the chieftain quickly. "I will not harm you, Manchu. So, I remember now the old warrior's face. It was like that of Khlit as it has been described to me. Dog of the devil! That is strange. What does the Curved Saber in the land of Wan Li?"

"That is for his telling," responded the Manchu curtly, not failing to note the other's quickened interest. His own indifference appeared the greater. Khlit had chosen his messenger well. "He comes to the Togra early tomorrow. I will meet him and say that you will not hear his tidings."

DOKADUR KHAN meditated, his thoughts mirrored in his swarthy, pock-marked countenance. Khlit he knew to be a warrior of note, one who had more than once caused grief to the men of the hat and girdle. What was he doing alone on the plains? Surely, it must be an important mission. He recalled that Khlit had hinted at a certain event that was to come to pass. What was this?

"He comes alone to the Togra?"

"What friends has he in the camp of Wan Li?" countered Arslan. "Nay, there will be few with him."

"He is the foe of Wan Li, without doubt."

"He has many enemies."

"And he schemes to take plunder from the Chinese courtiers during the hunt?"

Arslan laughed. Khlit had not told him what was in his mind, but the archer knew it was not that. He judged that the Cossack had come to Wei Chung's *yâmen* to gain sight of the Chinese court and that yesterday he had made up his mind on a course of action. What this might be, he did not know.

"Does a great khan seek for such plunder? In your village you know not the ways of the white-boned."

The Tatar tradition of believing nobles to possess white bones and their inferiors black was known to Dokadur Khan, who stared ominously at the archer, angered, yet curious and anxious to learn what was in his visitor's mind.

If Arslan had delivered his message outright, claiming refuge and aid for himself and Khlit against the men of Wan Li, Dokadur Khan would have given him a contemptuous refusal. This in spite of the magic of Khlit's name. For the slow-witted khan could have nothing but indifference for men who sought help from him. But an enterprise against Wan Li

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was another matter and familiar ground to him.

"I also am a khan not lightly named by men," he boasted, and Arslan smiled at the vanity of the man. "I have two thousand horsemen in the Togra, who are proved fighters, the chosen warriors of a dozen tribes."

Arslan looked fleetingly at the motley array of riders, lying about the fires, occupied with bowl and dice. Mongrels, he thought, but hardy.

"Hey," he growled as if disappointed, "no more? Khlit of the Curved Saber has led fifty times as many. Nay, I was at his side in the pillaging of Shan-kiang. Still, he has said that the fewer men the larger portions of spoil."

Dokadur Khan scowled.

"What is his plan?"

"He will say. How should I know? Am I one of the white-boned? But this I will tell you. In the Ming court the leaders are no more of one mind. Wan Li is fast losing his grip on the Dragon throne. Others have their hands on it already. The factions may divide during the hunt. And while they fight among themselves—Nay, you are said to be quick of wit."

"Aye, that I am. If the Chinese quarrel, we may profitably join with one party, now that they are on the plains, far from their main armies."

Arslan laughed long.

"Have you forgotten the wisdom of Khlit? Would he waste thought on such a plan? Not so. I tell you he is foe to the end with the Dragon court. Can you not see what he means to do?"

The shrewd archer knew that others were within hearing and that Dokadur Khan would be loath to admit his stupidity. As he had fancied, it came to pass.

"Aye, Manchu. But I will speak only with Khlit. He and I are one kind."

"See that your men are ready when he comes. He will act quickly, or I know him not."

Hence it was that the band of Dokadur Khan watched expectantly from the defiles of the Togra the coming of Khlit. But at this time, although Arslan did not know it, the old Cossack was riding to them, hard-pressed and harassed, a man marked for death by a half million swords, and the outlawed foe of the Ming nobility, as well as the party of Wei Chung and the Lady Li.

V

Two men may have equal cunning, but he who can best look into the mind of the other shall be leader. Not otherwise.

THE sun was near the point of midday the morning after Arslan's arrival at the camp of Dokadur Khan when Khlit and six followers spurred their wearied horses into a gallop within the shadows of the Togra ravines.

More men had been with the Cossack at dawn. Some had fallen by lucky pistol-shots of the pursuing Chinese—who were poor marksmen with this new weapon. More had dropped behind when their horses became exhausted. These, facing death with grim hardihood, knelt by their fallen beasts and shot what arrows remained to them into the ranks of their pursuers. Thus, each man lost in this manner had served to delay the Chinese as a straggling deer holds the wolf-pack for a moment until its flesh is torn from its bones.

Khlit had done his best for the men. Well-mounted himself, he stayed near the rear of his group of riders, encouraging them and directing their course. They knew as well as he that there was no hope of quarter at the hands of the Chinese soldiery. On the frontier of the Dragon empire war is carried out to its termination —the sword or bow-string for able-bodied men, the conqueror's *kang* for children and handsome women, and whatever spoil may be available taken to the last bit of bronze or of silk cloth.

The Cossack had taken responsibility for the betrayal of the huntsmen upon hmself. He had suspected that they were to be tools in Wei Chung's intrigue. But how was he to foresee the manner of the eunuch's treachery?

The men were content to follow him. They knew the fate that lay upon them after the burning of Wan Li's chair. It mattered not if Wei Chung proclaimed it a plot on the part of the huntsmen or an accident. It meant death for them in the land of the Dragon. And Khlit had said they might yet be saved. By reason of his careful leadership during the pursuit, they had come to believe there might be truth in his words.

They rode into the nearest rock-bound defile with horses foam-flecked and dark with sweat. They splashed across a stream

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and wound into some scattered scrub larches. As they did so, one who had looked behind gave an exclamation.

Khlit glanced over his shoulder in time to see two of the pursuing Chinese drop from their saddles with the feathered ends of arrows sticking from their chests. The others drew rein. The arrows continued to fly from the larch clump with great accuracy, and presently the riders turned and galloped back the way they had come. They were lost to sight almost at once in a bend in the ravine.

The huntsmen walked their horses forward slowly. Out of the larches trotted Arslan, several of the bandits following.

"Ho, uncle and brothers," laughed the Manchu. "You bring a swarm of venomous insects into the Togra. Where are the others of our band?"

"Slain," said an evil-looking plainsman with an oath.

"Nay, devil take it—Kurluk?"

"Slain."

Briefly Khlit told Arslan what had happened at the beginning of the hunt and asked for Dokadur Khan. The sobered archer informed him that the master of the Togra with the bulk of his men was at the encampment, a short distance into the defiles. Also, that strong troops of Chinese had been sighted riding toward the Togra from the plain.

"It was an evil day we entered the service of the devil-begotten Wei Chung," he growled. "Kurluk and two-score brave fellows spitted like ripe fowls! Nay, that is an ill word. Bethink you, lord, our lives hang by a thin halter here. The Chinese will not lightly give up the pursuit. And Dokadur Khan has seen them and suspects that it is you they are after. He is like a weed moved in the wind, a friend to the strongest side. It may enter his fat head to give us up to the Dragon riders."

"I sent you with a message."

"It was faithfully delivered." Arslan recounted what had passed between him and the bandit chief. "Nay," he concluded, "where the saddle chafes is here. Dokadur Khan believes you have come to offer him a share in a rare *barranca*, with excellent spoil for the bait. Instead you come like a tired antelope, marked by the falcon——"

"You did well. What do the Chinese?"

"The yellow faces are spreading out to cover all approaches to the Togra on the east—whence you have come—so our lookouts report. Presently they will enter not one but several of the passes at once. They are many, with leaders."

"Then take me to Dokadur Khan."

Khlit was silent until they reached the encampment where the master of the Togra was seated on his horse, several hundred followers with him. He eyed Khlit blackly as the Cossack rode forward with his dust-coated men. He did not raise his hand in greeting, nor did he offer to speak. Arslan would have broken the silence but refrained at a quick glance from Khlit.

The huntsmen scanned the men of the Togra with the searching glances of those whose lives are at stake yet who hope little. It was clear that Dokadur Khan was not pleased at their coming.

"Have you no more men than these?" said Khlit suddenly. "I sent you a warning to be ready. These men are not enough."

Dokadur Khan grunted in sheer surprize. The Cossack had spoken like a leader who finds fault with a subordinate. Yet the Khirghiz saw that he had only seven riders with him and had come fleeing for his life.

"I have thrice this number," he assured Khlit; then he scowled, fearing to lose dignity before his men. "My sentries tell me you are followed by the Chinese. The Togra is no place for doomed men. Your archer lied to me. Why should I not give you to the Chinese—since he has lied?"

In spite of himself he had asked the question. Khlit had not the manner of a hunted man. And Dokadur Khan found it hard to forget the reputation of the Cossack leader.

"They will be here within the hour," he continued as Khlit was silent. "Already they form for attacking the defiles. We will bind you and give you to them, for thus we can save ourselves from attack and our villages from fire. I did not bid you come to the Togra with yonder hounds at your heels."

A murmur of assent from his men greeted these words. Arslan frowned. It was clear that the chieftain was excited, even frightened and thus dangerous. The huntsmen had dismounted and were watching Khlit.

The Cossack was still gazing at Dokadur Khan fixedly. Abruptly he laughed, and Arslan took a deep breath of surprize.

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"We must make our peace with the Chinese," scowled Dokadur Khan. "We have no quarrel with them."

"In my first visit," said Khlit slowly, "I marked you as one light of wit, yet I did not think the leader of a thousand men was altogether a fool. I know not if that be true. Answer me a question, Dokadur Khan. Know you why the men of the Dragon seek our lives?"

"It matters not."

"Nay, it matters much. They believe, falsely, that we have slain Wan Li. But they believe."

In spite of himself the Khirghiz gaped.

"Wan Li—the Son of Heaven—slain?"

Khlit nodded grimly.

"Ask these men who came with me. The sedan-chair of the Lord of Ten Thousand Years was set fire to this dawn. There was a great killing of those around him at the time. By the speed of our horses we escaped."

The importance of the news was beginning to leak into the thick skull of the khan.

"And you rode here," he growled. "A dog without home or friends. Nay, you are accursed now. We must surely give you up."

"How?"

"Dog of the devil! I will see to it myself."

"And admit the Chinese to the Togra?" Khlit laughed again, and Arslan's black eyes gleamed, for he thought he saw light. "Nay, then you are altogether a fool, Dokadur Khan. Think you the men of the Dragon will stay their hand when they have slain us? Is the killing of an emperor so little a thing? Will they leave you and your villages unharmed? You know it is not so."

The khan glanced down the ravine blackly. He realized the truth of what Khlit said. The huntsmen of the Cossack were much like his own men in race and appearance. Moreover, his own reputation with the Chinese was hardly above suspicion. Once in the Togra, the Chinese would undoubtedly slay right and left until their bloodthirst was appeased.

"If we give you up and flee to the upper defiles of the Togra Nor, they will weary of the pursuit in time."

But in the eyes of Dokadur Khan and his men there was the glint of fear. They knew the numbers and strength of the men of Wan Li. In any case, their lot would be hard, and many would die.

Khlit leaned forward in his saddle and spoke quietly.

"Then you will lose the man who can aid you. I am that man. Fool! Do you think my coming of itself brought the men of Wei Chung hither? Nay, they would have come in any case, for the eunuch must have planned to slay hundreds of men on the frontier to bear out his scheme—to throw the blame for Wan Li's death on the bandits. I alone know something that will protect you and your men and their women. If you give me up, your hope of safety will be gone. For then I will not tell you what I know. Choose and choose quickly, for the Chinese are approaching the passes in force."

DOKADUR KHAN pretended to weigh the words of Khlit, while Arslan and the huntsmen watched without seeming to do so. In reality the mind of the Togra chief was tumultuous with uncertainty and fear. He had never been called upon to face the united strength of the Chinese forces. The fact that they were riding upon the defiles excited and flurried him. A bold enough man where a small *barranca* was concerned, the magnitude of the coming event confused him.

The calmness of Khlit further puzzled Dokadur Khan. How was it that the Cossack was untroubled, unless he knew of a secret reason by which he could win safety? It was true that the men of Wei Chung would lay waste the outlaw settlements of the Togra. And Dokadur Khan had no place to flee; no ally except Khlit.

"What is it that you know?" he demanded.

And Khlit knew that he had won his cause. But the way was not yet cleared.

"That which will save us—you and me and our men. What I know, no one else knows."

Dokadur Khan stirred impatiently.

"Already some Chinese have been slain in the Togra," added Khlit.

One of the Khirghiz riders who had been with Arslan spoke.

"It was the Manchu archer."

"Do the men of the Dragon know the difference?" asked Arslan logically, and

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by Khlit's silence he knew he had said the right thing.

The bandit khan scowled the more, and his followers swore. After this, they knew, there would be no escape from the Chinese.

"Nay, Khlit," he asked, "speak. What is your thought? There is no time to be lost."

The Cossack drew his whip slowly through his hand.

"We did not slay Wan Li, Dokadur Khan. The plot was the work of others. Of Wei Chung and his allies. They pursue us—and you. But other factions of the Dragon men do not yet know what is the truth of the event this morning. They would not slay us until they know what we know. From them we have not so much to fear. If Wei Chung's guilt is proved, we are free men. I speak of the other Ming nobles and especially Li Yuan, the astrologer."

"Would you have us go to Li Yuan, the whole of us with women and children! Nay, how may that be? The men of Wei Chung are already on three sides of the Togra, and they number five times our strength. Li Yuan is at the Great Wall."

"By now, at the news of Wan Li's death, he will be riding toward the Liao *yâmen*."

"Even thus, how may we reach him?"

"In due time. That was not my plan."

The men of the Togra cursed uneasily. Each moment increased their fear, a fact which did not escape Khlit.

"Harken, Dokadur Khan," he continued. "My thought was that a picked few of us can win through the forces of Wei Chung tonight with darkness. The rest can hold the Togra. The ravines are well nigh impregnable if well held. Have you a place where the women and children can be concealed?

"Aye, a rocky gorge near the lake. It is reached by a hidden tunnel."

"It is well." Khlit snapped his whip as if reaching a decision. "But this must be a fair bargain, Dokadur Khan. My men must have fresh horses and good ones. There must be no further talk of lies or treachery. We are of one race, we plainsmen, and the yellow faces are our enemies. If we hold together, we will win free. But you must do as I order."

The slant eyes of the khan narrowed as he considered this. Here was a request that endangered his own prestige. If Khlit took the reins of leadership and was successful, his men would hold him in contempt. The Cossack shrewdly guessed what was in his mind.

"We will do more than win free," he said. "We will gain spoil the equal of three years of your raids. I promised it, and it will come to pass. Thus your men will be rewarded."

"Where is this spoil?"

"The Golden Tomb. The gateway is unearthed."

To a man they stared at him, and Dokadur Khan gnawed his mustache. How might they go to the Golden Tomb when their own lives were in danger?

"The Togra is a natural fortress," explained Khlit, who was watching him. "None can defend it so well as you. Arrange the defense as best suits you. The Chinese attack upon us, under Wei Chung, will draw them all to the Togra. Wei Chung dares not turn back until we are slain, for we are witnesses against him when any can be found to hear us. In the excitement the Golden Tomb will be forgotten. It will be lightly guarded. With darkness I will take a hundred men, pass through the ranks of Wei Chung and ride to the tomb."

"I will go with you," meditated the khan.

"As pleases you. Tomorrow, when we have gained the ear of Li Yuan and the nobles, the attack on the Togra will be given up, for Wei Chung and Ch'en Ti-jun must hasten back to the Lady Li, their ally, if suspicion is aroused against them."

Dokadur Khan hesitated. If Khlit went with them, they need not suspect treachery from him, because he would be at their mercy. Yet the prospect of the ride across the frontier troubled him. For the third time Khlit guessed at his thought.

"In the Golden Tomb," he added, "is the wealth of an emperor, riches enough to load a dozen horses. We will take the extra horses with us. And at the Golden Tomb we may win safety from the wiles of Wei Chung."

"It will be dangerous," objected the Khirghiz, who nevertheless saw the eyes of his men glitter.

"Nay, Khan," growled Arslan suddenly, "if you follow not the plan of the Curved Saber, our heads shall decorate the saddles of Wei Chung's men in any case. Is there no danger in that? Are we sleek sheep to

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wait in a huddle for the happy dispatch of the butcher?"

A growl of agreement rose from the bandits. Dokadur Khan lifted his hand in decision.

"It shall be as you say, Khlit."

"Remember, Dokadur Khan," warned the Cossack, "there will be many slain. This is not a game of children. Ho, men of the Togra, have you good heart for kingly spoil and the clash of sharp swords? Will you put your strength against the evil brain of the eunuch?"

"Aye!" shouted those within hearing. "We be of good heart," added one. "We will follow the Curved Saber!" shouted another, the one who had been with Arslan.

"It is well," said Khlit, satisfied. "Now do you see to the defense of the ravines, Dokadur Khan. You have skill at that. I and those with me will sleep until the shadows are long in the afternoon, for we are weary. Then waken us, having picked a hundred good men."

And Arslan wondered to himself. He had seen a man worn and hunted, with only seven followers, win mastery over a thousand who wished him ill rather than good. And he had watched the plan of that man put into action over the objections of the khan of the Togra. Yet he had a doubt. Were they to face Li Yuan, loaded with the spoil of the Golden Tomb? If not, how were they to win back to safety with their burden? And what of the Lady Li, who was still at the *yâmen* with many followers?

THE six who had ridden with Khlit to the Togra had not slept in thirty hours, and they quickly fell into a doze after retreating a short distance into the ravines to a cleared place which served as a meeting-spot for the tribesmen. The Cossack, however, did not join them until he had seen to the selection of eight fresh horses for himself and his followers and the preparation of a good meal against their waking. Arslan aided him in this, for the confusion in the place was great, owing to the preparations of Dokadur Khan.

Khlit did not rest until everything had been arranged to his satisfaction. This done, he seated himself on his saddle, back against a sheltering rock, and was asleep on the moment. Arslan noticed that a small urchin of the encampment stood beside Khlit, holding his horse, and refused to move. When he questioned the boy, the Khirghiz told him that he had once guided Khlit out of the Togra and was waiting in hopes of being taken on the expedition that night.

"Ho, small warrior," chuckled the archer, "we take no one who can not quaff a bucket of the Ming men's blood. But, if the jade Fortune blesses my bow, you shall have the skull of one Ch'en Ti-jun to play with ere nightfall."

With that he swaggered off to his horse, and sought the ranks of the tribesmen.

Dokadur Khan was a skilled leader at this form of warfare. Moreover, his men were fired by hatred of those who had invaded their fastness. It was too late to try to hold the entrances to the Togra, but within these Dokadur Khan had distributed his men in ambush at strategic points.

Arslan knew that the narrow, rocky gorges would afford little cover to the Chinese. Few trees grew in the place, and frequently the ravines contained streams up which Wei Chung's soldiers must force their way, coming as often as not to the blind barrier of a waterfall. The tribesmen knew the ground thoroughly and used their knowledge to good advantage.

Attracted by scattered shots, Arslan made his way to a height where a score of the Khirghiz held one of the main approaches of the Togra. Dismounting, the Manchu saw that the ranks of the mandarins' troops had been thinned by the arrows of those above and they were giving ground in confusion. Their few pistols and arquebuses, badly aimed, were not sufficient to annoy the concealed bowmen.

"This is but idle sport," laughed Arslan. "Come, we will make music for our friends below."

Unslinging the guitar from which he rarely parted, he struck the strings and sang, exposing himself recklessly.

"In the land of the mighty bowmen
The Ming men come,
To find a doughty foeman
In his Togra home."

Heedless of the pistol-balls which sped near him, he composed another verse.

"The fox is in his burrow,
O wise Wei Chung!
Red wine will warm the furrow
Of the Liao Tung."

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He ceased his chant as the scattered soldiers in the ravine below gave back against the cliffs. The men beside him peered out from their concealment in time to see an array of armor-clad footmen advancing through the ranks of the routed horsemen. Over their vital parts they wore heavy-quilted pads. At their head went a banner of one of the armies of Wan Li.

"Oho," muttered Arslan, unslinging his bow, "here we have a goose that will require another kind of plucking. Fall to, good sirs, with your arrows and decorate yonder quilts for me."

The archers plied their shafts. A few of the foot-soldiers fell, struck in the face and throat, but the majority passed on, closing up their files. These were not the mounted rabble of the hunt, but paid soldiers of the emperor, intent, as they believed, on avenging his death.

"Drop your bows, good sirs," directed Arslan, noting the ill-success of the arrows, "and we will make cannon of ourselves and bump the helmets of the gentry beneath us."

The tribesmen caught his idea and fell to with a will, some of the older men and boys who had been hiding behind them dragging up the stones and the archers launching them over the cliff. Several rocks, bounding down the ravine, did good execution, but the trained soldiery parted their ranks to let them roll through and pressed forward, although more slowly.

Even Arslan's high good humor, bred by the prospect of battle, was beginning to fail when there was a shout from his companions. Down the ravine he saw a body of horsemen galloping, led by one of the lieutenants of Dokadur Khan. The mounted men struck the first ranks of the Chinese and crumpled them, pressing them back on those in the rear. Their armor was poor protection against the expert swords of the riders, and they gave ground.

It was not the custom of the tribesmen to continue such a hot hand-to-hand conflict, and they withdrew presently, leaving the Chinese badly cut up by their charge. The invaders halted where they were, waiting the coming of reinforcements before renewing their efforts. Seeing this, Arslan mounted and left the spot, seeking Ch'en Ti-jun.

Much the same kind of conflict was raging in the other ravines, the tribesmen inflicting heavy losses on the Chinese and withdrawing slowly when overmatched. The struggle was bitter, neither side asking quarter, but it was difficult for the Chinese to gain the heights as they were ignorant of the paths up the rocks. Whenever they attempted to climb the cliffs, old men and boys of the Togra greeted them with rocks and spear-points. By late afternoon, the Chinese had won forward only a few miles at a heavy cost.

Arslan noted the success of his new companions with high glee. He was untiring in his efforts to locate Ch'en Ti-jun, and by diligent inquiries he was finally successful. The lieutenant of Wei Chung was directing one of the attacks against the heights from his sedan-chair, attended by a few followers. Arslan rode to the spot at once, and his slant eyes glittered evilly as he looked down from a nest of rocks upon the gilt chair of the eunuch.

The distance, however, was too great for an arrow. Arslan surveyed the scene before him carefully. The bulk of the Chinese soldiery were pressing forward with shouts and cries into one of the passes beside him, harassed as they went by the vindictive tribesmen. Other groups of the eunuch's horsemen were acting apparently as a reserve some distance in the rear. The sedan-chair rested in the center of a natural amphitheater, surrounded by rocky heights through which ran the pass the Chinese were assaulting.

The smile faded from the Manchu's dark face as he unslung his bow and saw to his saddle-girths. Gripping his steppe pony with his knees, he spurred forward quickly. The snorting horse slid and sprang downward among the rocks. Arslan kept his eyes fixed on the yellow sedan. So far he was unobserved.

"The philosophers have said," he muttered piously, "that with the slayer of his brother alive a man may not rest unavenged. May I prosper in my honorable purpose!"

He was now clear of the last of the rocks and spurred his mount forward. A shout told him that the men around Ch'en Ti-jun had seen him. As he rode, he fitted arrow to bowstring and bent low in the saddle. Other shafts flew around him. The servants seized spears and swords and ran toward him. But the experienced archer swerved his horse, to pass the sedan at a short distance from it.

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Then he launched his shaft, reaching over his shoulder for another from the quiver. Swiftly he sent three other arrows crashing through the brittle lacquer-work of the sedan and grinned as he heard a shrill scream. His horse stumbled and fell, struck by a pistol-ball. The archer sprang clear nimbly and ran for the rocks on the further side of the clearing, waving his bow triumphantly. The servants pursued him.

From the sedan-chair the bearers saw dark drops falling to the earth. Ch'en Ti-jun no longer screamed.

Arslan had now gained the slope of the ravine, but a hue and cry was raised about him. He paused from time to time to discharge an arrow at his pursuers. The servants of the dead eunuch were soon distanced, but the Chinese men-at-arms nearby had observed him and were closing in.

The Manchu was forced to drop his bow and take to his sword. When a foeman appeared from behind the rocks, Arslan sprang at him with catlike agility, his small frame twisting and writhing. From the first of these encounters he emerged successful. Men were now running toward him from all sides.

He stood in his tracks, swinging his short sword, his eyes red, agrin with the lust of slaying. Then he lifted his deep voice in song.

"The tide of blood is flooding,
With the setting sun;
When I see the ravens brooding
Over Ch'en Ti-jun."

He cut a menacing spear-point from its haft and slew the wielder. Then he hurled himself at the group of his enemies.

IT WAS during the last of twilight that the Khirghiz lad, who had waited to see the departure of Khlit and his fellow horsemen, remembered the words of the Manchu archer. Arslan, the child reflected, had been missed when the picked horsemen under Khlit and Dokadur Khan rode off.

Searching among the slain where Arslan had last been seen the boy came upon the archer. The Manchu was half-sitting, half-lying against a stone, and at first the grin stamped on his dark face deceived the lad into thinking he was still alive. A second glance showed him the breastplate torn off and the body hacked from throat to belt.

The boy did not pause by his Manchu acquaintance. He was too busy despoiling the other slain of their weapons. But after a moment's consideration he left the body of Arslan unmolested. He remembered that he had heard that spirits of the unburied dead peopled the earth, and Arslan had been too hardy a warrior to risk enmity with his shade, fresh from the *rakchas* and the ten courts of purgatory.

KHLIT had missed Arslan at the assembly and guessed that his comrade was slain when he did not appear. But the business of the hundred riders could not wait. When the men were equipped and ready, he followed Dokadur Khan out of the Togra at the head of the horsemen, noting that they took the hidden path through which the boy he had befriended had led him on his first visit to the place.

The men, numbering one hundred and seven, counting Khlit and his surviving huntsmen, were picked with care from the bands of the Togra and were well-mounted on fresh horses. Khlit had also seen that a score of led horses were brought. During the ride through the ravines, he let Dokadur Khan guide him, but once clear of the defiles he assumed the leadership himself. To this the Khirghiz made no objection. He had the good sense to see that the dice were now cast.

The safety of his own men, surrounded in the Togra, rested on the success of their expedition. The defenders of the wilderness could hold out for another day and night. After that they must have aid, or the forces of Wei Chung, embittered by their losses, must be withdrawn. His companions were satisfied that Khlit spoke the truth. The magic word, Golden Tomb, had been sufficient to still their doubts.

But, as Dokadur Khan rode after Khlit, who was leading them by landmarks and sight of the stars, through scattered bands of the Chinese, he bethought him. During the heat of the day's conflict the hkan had had little time for consideration of Khlit's plan.

Now he reflected. It was true that Li Yuan and the older nobles would pay highly for proof of Wei Chung's guilt. It might be true, furthermore, that they were at the

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yâmen at Liao. And that Khlit might reach them there, since Wei Chung's party were at the outskirts of the Togra.

But would Li Yuan believe what they said? It would appear to the Ming nobles that the plainsmen were trying to throw guilt on the eunuch to save themselves. Lady Li was with the Ming party. Dokadur Khan had heard that the favorite had a guileful tongue. Who were they to confute her words? He knew that Wei Chung and the Lady Li were the ruling party at the court.

"I have considered all this," Khlit answered briefly when Dokadur Khan drew up beside him and voiced his doubts. "In the Golden Tomb is that which will save us."

Dokadur Khan weighed this laboriously in his mind and was not satisfied. Were they to plunder the tomb? That was well enough in its way. There would be much gold. But, once possessed of the treasure, after driving off or slaying the *kang leen*, they would be between the forces of Li Yuan and the eunuch.

How could they go to the Ming nobles with the wealth of the Golden Tomb in their hands and say that they came as friends? This was a heavy doubt, and to the slow mind of Dokadur Khan it appeared insuperable. Apparently they were to go first to the grave and then to the *yâmen*. How would they guard the treasure when approaching the Ming party? In time it would be seen, and the truth would be known. Moreover, it would provide rare reasons for the nimble tongue of the Lady Li to pour into the ears of the nobles.

"Silence is best, Dokadur Khan," snarled Khlit when he explained what was in his mind. "Does the condemned criminal debate with himself whether the noose that will hang him shall be silk or horse-hair? Our plight, thanks to the evil Wei Chung, is no better than that. If we succeed, we shall save our skins and the lives of your folk in the Togra. If we fail, our fate will be no worse than in the Togra."

"Nay," growled the chieftain, "you have not heard of the torture of the red-hot nails driven slowly into the ears or that of the wooden donkey."

"Aye, I have heard. But, if we win what we seek, the ears may happily be those of Wei Chung."

"There may be truth in that. But, harken, Khlit, you do not seek to hold the treasure of the Golden Tomb as ransom for our lives?"

"The treasure is vast. But thrice its worth would not serve to turn aside the vengeance of the Mings against those who have slain him they call the Son of Heaven."

Dokadur Khan considered this in silence.

"Then you have proof that will convict Wei Chung?" he asked.

To his surprize Khlit laughed.

"I have no proof."

"If that be so, you can not prove to Li Yuan that Wei Chung slew the emperor."

"Nay, I can not do so."

"Nor that the Lady Li is guilty?"

"How should I have such proof?"

"You swore——"

"That at the Golden Tomb we may yet save our lives. Harken, Dokadur Khan, if you must think, consider this. In this land it is said that the spirit of the unburied will be met with by those who are blood-guilty. Wei Chung and the Lady Li are guilty, and Li Yuan is a man of wisdom who knows the high arts of divination and magic."

Whereupon Dokadur Khan, who understood not what Khlit had said, was silent. Which was what Khlit desired, for their task in reaching the Golden Tomb was difficult.

They rode fast, avoiding the caravan tracks and keeping to the plains. Fortunately the countryside was aroused by the news of Wan Li's death, and such bands of soldiers as were in the vicinity of the *yâmen* were debating whether to take sides with the Ming nobles or Wei Chung. It was rumored that already the Lady Li had claimed the Dragon throne for her infant son and was gathering troops to support her cause.

On the other hand the Ming party, consisting of those sent from Wan Li by Wei Chung before the hunt, was already nearing the *yâmen*. This served to throw the province of Liao into confusion in which it was possible for the small band of tribesmen to make their daring ride unmolested and almost unnoticed.

Only once more did Dokadur Khan speak when Khlit had halted to inquire the way of a peasant.

"If there is no proof and the gold treasure will avail us naught," he said slowly, "what is it in the Golden Tomb that will save our lives?"

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Khlit was silent for a moment.

"I followed Wan Li into the tomb entrance," he responded. "And, while the emperor was kneeling before the shrine of his ancestor, I saw what gives me hope now and what brings us here."

Dokadur Khan breathed quickly.

"Did you see Wan Li write something down and leave it in the tomb? He may have suspected Wei Chung."

"He wrote nothing. I have said he prayed."

"Then did Wei Chung leave proof of his guilt?"

"He has left no proof."

"What, then?"

Khlit turned irritably in his saddle.

"This. See you that star ahead of us?"

"Aye, Khlit."

"And its reflection in yonder pool of water?"

"Aye."

"It is the star called by the wise Li Yuan the star of evil omen. He spoke truly What I saw in the tomb was not the star. But it was like to it. Ho, Dokadur Khan," laughed Khlit with sudden merriment, "I was looking at two emperors, one living and one dead. Yet before my eyes formed the image of death. When I tell what I know to Li Yuan he will understand. For he is a man of wisdom, while you are one without sense."

Surely, thought Dokadur Khan, Khlit was mad. For how could he have seen the likeness of death with his eyes? And how could a dead man come to life to save their lives? Nay, they were doomed to the fate of the red-hot nails. For the peasant had said that the Chinese army and many of those at court were joining the ranks of Wei Chung and the Lady Li, and the cause of the Ming nobles appeared lost.

VI

The wisdom of a shrewd man is like finely tempered steel. It is like to a sword of rare workmanship.

For it may slay its owner in the same manner as the enemies of its possessor. But it does not blunder amiss.

THE excitement that held the Liao province in its grip had reached the *kang leen*, during that night in the seventh noon. The captain and soldiers who guarded the tombs in the pine hills were debating among themselves which party to join. In their quarreling they neglected to fill in the entrance to the Golden Tomb. It is not impossible that they considered, if civil war broke out in the Dragon empire, they might despoil the mausoleum for themselves.

It is related in the chronicles of Wan Li that because of this confusion the *kang leen* neglected to post the usual sentries. Even as late as the third hour of that night they were gathered in groups about the fires in front of their pavilion. Thus it was that they failed to see the troop of horsemen which approached swiftly from the plain, dividing at the first of the pine hills, to ride to either side.

Doubtless the neglect of the captain would have been punished by torture at the hands of his superiors if he had survived. It is written that the blight of an evil conscience falls upon a man without warning. In this case he had argued to his men that, by going over to the rising power of Wei Chung, whom he knew to be already hastening back to the *yâmen* and to Peking, they would be on the stronger side. And might also despoil the tomb without reproach, since they were no longer of the Ming party.

To this some objected that the spirits of the mighty dead might trouble them. But the treasure of the tomb, although they had not seen it, they knew to be of great value. Hence the majority sided with the captain. But, before they could act, the retribution for their evil intentions, as written in the annals of that year, was upon them.

From the pine clumps on either side of the fires came the hurried beat of horses' hoofs, followed by cries of the soldiers by the outer fires. The *kang leen* ran for their arms which were scattered around the camp, as they had become careless in their talk. They saw the flash of swords in the firelight, and two groups of horsemen rode among the fires, one from the north, one from the south.

The captain of the *kang leen* was among the first slain. His men, surprized and ignorant of their foes, made a poor defense for picked troops of the Liao province. Some formed in groups with their spears; others fled into the darkness, but the greater part submitted to slaughter with the fatality of their race. The invading horsemen made no prisoners. To the fleeing

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kang leen it seemed that the evil they had summoned upon their heads had been swift in coming.

Khlit saw to it that no fugitives were left, concealed in the pine clumps. He had lost few men in the attack. He sent some of his horsemen to harry the scattered guardians of the tomb and others to set fire to the pavilion so that they should have an abundance of light to work by. When he was satisfied that the place held no more of his enemies, he summoned Dokadur Khan with a few men and approached the entrance to the tomb.

The flames that rose from the pavilion that had sheltered the *kang leen* showed him that little earth had been restored to the excavation. Some had fallen in from the sides; that was all. Doubtless the news of Wan Li's death had interrupted the work of filling in the earth over the stairs.

With the tools that lay at hand he had his men clear the steps. By this time all the plainsmen had returned from their tasks and were clustered about the excavation, staring. Only Dokadur Khan and a few others went with him down the steps. They had heard what he had said about the spirits of the dead.

These few carried torches. By their light Khlit set about opening the massive stone gate. The fastenings were of heavy iron, and the gate itself was a foot or more in thickness. It was some time before the way was clear for it to swing back.

Then it took a dozen stout fellows to move it on its stone hinges. It creaked slowly open, and the tribesmen hung back. It was a place of the dead, and none of them cared to enter except Khlit, who lacked superstition. Nevertheless the Cossack's eyes shone strangely under their shaggy brows as he led Dokadur Khan and the torch-bearers forward into the grave tunnel.

The stale odor of cold and confined air struck their nostrils, and their boots echoed on the stone. The tribesmen glanced curiously at the lofty pillars of teakwood and at the further door.

Khlit walked the length of the grave tunnel in silence and pushed open the inner door, which was lighter, being designed to be swung back by one man. Standing within the threshold of the inner door, they now saw the cavernous grave chamber, lighted by the everlasting candles of the tomb. And the plainsmen halted in their tracks with muttered oaths. Before them glittered the wealth of the Golden Tomb.

And in the tomb stood Wan Li.

THE Lord of Ten Thousand Years faced them impassively, his wide-sleeved arms folded across his deep chest, the candle-light caressing the sheen of his silk robe. Only his eyes moved, eyes under which were dark circles, searching from face to face.

Dokadur Khan recognized him and drew a deep breath of amazement. Here was the man the empire mourned as dead. Or was it really a living man? He swore softly but, looking long, was reassured. It was Wan Li, undoubtedly alive. His followers were uncertain, gaping and moving uneasily while they looked from Khlit to Dokadur Khan and from them to Wan Li. They had forgotten the wealth that they had first seen in their bewilderment. Only Khlit was tranquil.

"As I promised, Dokadur Khan," he said grimly, "here is what will save our lives. The Son of Heaven was left by Wei Chung in the tomb of his ancestor."

The emperor spoke sharply, but none among the plainsmen understood his words, which were in the dialect of Peking, the court speech. Dokadur Khan swore again; then he laughed gruffly. Then he stared at Khlit.

"How has this come to pass?" he asked, and the men hung upon Khlit's response, pressing forward.

"Stand back," commanded the Cossack sharply. "Wan Li is no foe of ours. Moreover, his safety means our lives. Nay, the matter is simple. I have said I came to the tomb, watching Wan Li from the shadows. As I said, I saw the dead emperor in his coffin and the living monarch. Wan Li. And also the image. For, as I watched, I saw another enter the tomb after me, unseen by Wan Li. It was a eunuch, much like the emperor in face, and dressed in similar robes. He it was who walked from the tomb, while Wan Li was shut within by his enemies. I saw it from the shadows of the stairs."

Dokadur Khan's mind moved slowly, and here was a weighty matter. He stared at the tall figure before him, wetting his bearded lips.

"And the other," he asked, "the false Wan Li——"

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"Was a servant of Wei Chung's. He was not suspected by the soldiery without the tomb when he walked to the sedan-chair, for what reason had they to doubt he was Wan Li? The mind of Wei Chung is dark and evil as that of a serpent."

"Then he planned to have Wan Li die in the tomb?"

"Without doubt. Of starvation and thirst. Harken, O slow of wit. See you not he plotted the death of the emperor. But it was needful to do it without casting suspicion on himself. He could not slay the Son of Heaven. So he slew the servant, being treacherous even to his own men and heedless of the life of one who served him. It was when he helped the false Wan Li into the sedan that he slew him with a knife. I saw the wound by the light of the fire that consumed the sedan."

The emperor stared at Khlit, striving to fathom what he said. In spite of his plight, he did not lose his habitual dignity.

"In this way," concluded Khlit, "Wei Chung silenced the mouth of the servant that might have betrayed him—for the race is one without honor—and, if he should have been discovered in that act, he could have said he did it to punish one who had assumed the person of the emperor. But he was not seen, and the chair with its body was burned as he plotted——"

"To hide the body that might have bared the trick," swore Dokadur Khan.

"And to cast the guilt upon us to conceal what he had done. That was why he wished to slay all who were present."

"Aye," assented the khan, who saw light at last and could understand this. "Death silences tale-bearers."

IN THE annals of Wan Li it is written that during the hunt of the seventh moon, when the star of evil omen was ascendent, Wan Li was missed for a day and night, being thought slain, until he was restored to Li Yuan and other nobles by a band of huntsmen who had found him.

That is all that is written, because much was left out owing to the evil influence of the eunuchs about the emperor. Still, the chronicles state that an open rebellion by the forces of the Lady Li was only averted by the fortunate appearance of the Son of Heaven at the *yâmen*. Owing to this the silken cord of happy dispatch was sent to the Lady Li, for her slim throat, by order of Wan Li himself.

Khlit had kept his imperial prisoner by his side and, escorted by Dokadur Khan and the remaining huntsmen, sought for and found the party of Li Yuan and the Ming nobles who were encamped near the *yâmen*, a few hours ride from the tomb. In the ranks of the Togra men a man was found who could converse with the emperor, and through him it was explained that his huntsmen had seen him imprisoned in the tomb and had rescued him. Whereupon they gave the Son of Heaven food and wine.

This done, Wan Li promised them that their lives should be safeguarded and they should receive a fitting reward. All this does not appear in the annals of his reign, owing to the power of Wei Chung, who censored all that was written.

Khlit and Dokadur Khan saw that Wan Li was delivered to Li Yuan, who greeted him on bent knees, accompanied by the other nobles of his party.

"It is a night of true beneficence," murmured the delighted astrologer. "Because the influence of the star of evil omen has been overcome by the rising birth-star of the Son of Heaven and the Lord of Ten Thousand Years."

Khlit did not understand this. He waited impatiently on his horse while the court kowtowed. He saw the silken cord of suicide sent to the beautiful favorite, without understanding what it meant.

But Wei Chung, who had arrived at the *yâmen*, heard, and sent a messenger to Wan Li bearing congratulations on his return and saying that his faithful servant, Wei Chung Hsien, had been striving to punish those who had conspired against the throne, the evil servants of the doomed Lady Li—so said the messenger—and who had nearly caused the Son of Heaven to lose his life while in the care of Wei Chung, who was innocent—thus ran the message—of all blame, because he had not been aware of the conspiracy of the Lady Li nor of the eunuch who had impersonated Wan Li.

"It is a lie!" Li Yuan had cried, lifting his clenched fists.

But Wan Li had hesitated. Nor would he give the word to slay the eunuch.

Hearing of what had passed from the plainsmen who understood the talk, Khlit did not at first believe that Wei Chung was

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actually to be spared. But his own eyes told him that Wan Li hesitated, unwilling to believe evil of the chief eunuch. Whereupon Khlit swore and whispered to Dokadur Khan to assemble his men. Unnoticed in the confusion, they left the *yâmen*. Riding swiftly, they gained the plain.

There they met the rest of their men with loaded pack-horses. Under cover of darkness they made their way out to the Togra. Dokadur Khan swaggered jubilantly in his saddle.

"Hey, old warrior," he cried familiarly to Khlit, "it is a good night's work. The spoil of the Golden Tomb, taken after we left with Wan Li, will well repay my men. Half of the treasure, as you have asked, will be sent to the Tatars, your old friends. You have served well me and mine, and I will see that the division is even, to the weight of a hair. The Tatars shall have a royal gift from you."

Khlit did not reply at once.

"I have seen the master of a million men," he said at length, "and he is a weaker man than you or Arslan or I. For he can not safeguard the lives of those who are his friends. Nor can he save his own. He will yet die by the hand of Wei Chung."

The tribesmen listened, for these were the words of one who had done them a great service. But they understood them not. At Khlit's next speech, however, they laughed with him.

"Hey, good sirs," he cried, leaning forward and patting the neck of his horse, "we have our lives and our good horses, and the free steppe is before us. It is well."

YOU OL' SON-OF-A-GUN

BY FRED P. CARBUTT

WHEN a fellow's feeling lonesome, just a-wandering up and down,
Away from home and folks he knows in some strange distant town.
When he's watching all the faces in the crowd that by him flows,
Just a-hoping by some chance to see some fellow that he knows.
Ain't it jake, when from behind him in the old familiar way,
He feels a hand upon his back and hears a glad voice say—
"You ol' son-of-a-gun!"

When you meet a chum that's worried, and he's looking down and out,
And you coax him just to tell you what the trouble's all about.
When you find his luck has passed him up; old Fate has used him rough,
And you've been there once or twice yourself, and found it pretty tough,
Ain't it grand to see the sparkle coming back into his eye,
When you dig right in and help him? Lord! It's jake to hear him cry—
"You ol' son-of-a-gun!"

When a bosom friend has passed you on the road and made his pile,
And you're still a-plodding foot by foot awaiting fortune's smile;
When your hairs commence to graying and you're still way down the trail,
And you're wond'ring if you'll make the grade, or like so many, fail.
Gee, it helps some when your lucky friend remembers your first name,
And treats you in the same old way, and greets you just the same—
"You ol' son-of-a-gun!"

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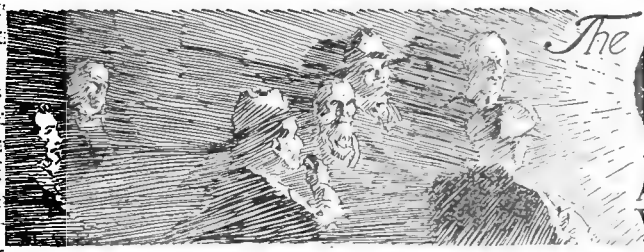

The Camp-Fire

A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

PIGTAILS—a word on them from H. A. Lamb in connection with his story in this issue:

New York.

By the way, in the future drawing for "The Star of Evil Omen," I'd like to voice a warning. Chinese of all classes, of the Ming period—up to 1643—who are in the story, did not wear pigtails. The Manchus did.

There are Manchu hunters with long hair in the story. But the Emperor and his court had short hair.

THE history of the pigtail is interesting. The Tatars—including the Manchus, who were and are of Tatar blood—worshiped the horse. They let their back hair grow and shaved their foreheads in imitation of a horse's mane.

The Cossacks had a lot of respect for the Tatars, and imitated them. Up to the present century the Cossacks grew a "scalp-lock," as Schweider has very accurately drawn.

When the Manchus conquered China proper, about 1640, they issued a dictum that long hair—pigtails—was the fashion. The adherents of the defeated Mings then had to wear pigtails or be beheaded. Most of them wore the tails.

Up to the present day a long pigtail was a sign of a valued citizen and official of China. Lately, the Chinks have left them off, more or less, like the binding on the feet of the Ming women.—HAROLD LAMB.

WHO will furnish the comrade inquiring with information concerning Benjamin Blockburger, Mexican War veteran and old-timer of the West?

Paterson, New Jersey.

I thought probably some of the readers might be able to give me a little information about Benjamin Blockburger who died in California in 1916. He was a veteran of the Mexican War—in fact, the last one alive at the time I knew him. According to the tales he told he fought the Indians, crossing the prairies several times in prairie-schooners, made a number of stakes in California and led a generally adventurous life in the West. He is distantly related to me and it was just lately I learned of his death. Any information would be greatly appreciated.—H. M.

ONE of the inquirers to "Ask Adventure" asked for the text of an old sea chantey entitled "The Flying Cloud." For once Captain Dingle was stumped; neither from his own memory nor from any of the book or magazine collections of chanteys could he draw the text of that particular one. But an appeal to the readers of our magazine did the work.

Complete versions came in from several of you and the chantey is given here in full. The versions differed among themselves in minor points; we have here followed, in the main, the version furnished by Captain J. A. Payne, Sapulpa, Oklahoma, but have in some dozen places substituted words, phrases or parts of lines from the version furnished by James McIntyre, Johnson City, Tennessee, where it differed and seemed better.

LATER we'll get a list of all published chanteys, pass that list on to Camp-Fire and ask for any other chanteys, title and text, that have not been preserved in print. There is no other agency in the world better adapted to getting results in such a matter and if we of the Camp-Fire can save from oblivion some of the chanteys that began to pass out of use with the passing of sailing vessels, we shall perform a very worth-while service.

And, meanwhile, here is one that, so far as we know, is not elsewhere preserved in print. (In the last stanza Captain Payne's version had "Madrid" instead of "Newgate.")

THE FLYING CLOUD

AN OLD SEA CHANTEY

My name is Patrick Hullahan, as you will understand,
I was born and reared in Waterford, in Erin's happy land.
When I was young and in my prime and fortune on me smiled,
My parents doted on me, I being an only child.

Now my father bound me to a trade, in Waterford's fair town.
He bound me to a cooper there, by the name of William Brown.
I served my master faithfully for eighteen months or more,

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Till I shipped on board the *Ocean Queen*, bound for Bermuda's shore.

Now when I reached Bermuda, I met with a Captain Moore,
The commander of the *Flying Cloud*, just out of Baltimore,
And he asked me for to sail with him, on a slavery voyage to go
To the burning shores of Africa, where the sugar-cane doth grow.

Now it was but a few weeks after, that we reached the African shore,
And it was five hundred of those poor slaves, from their native homes we bore.
We marched them on our quarter deck, and placed them well below.
It was eighteen inches to the man, but they were forced to go.

Now in a few days we set sail, with our cargo of slaves,
'Twould better have been for those poor men, had they been in their graves,
For the plague and fever came on board and swept them half away;
We would drag their bodies up on deck and heave them in the sea.

Now it was but a short time after, that we reached the Cuban shore
And sold them to the planters there, as slaves forevermore
To lead a hard and wretched life beneath that broiling sun,
The rice and cotton fields to hoe, till their career was run.

Now when our money was all spent, and we were out to sea again
Then Captain Moore he came on deck and said to us his men:
"There is gold and silver to be had, if you'll remain with me;
We'll hoist aloft the pirate flags and scour this Spanish Sea."

Now the *Flying Cloud* was a clipper ship, five hundred tons or more;
She could easily sail around anything sailing out of Baltimore.
Her sails were like the driven snow, and on them not a speck,
While twenty-four brass nine-pound guns she carried on her deck.

Well we all agreed except five lads, who asked to go on shore.
Now two of them were Boston boys, two more from Baltimore,
While the other was an Irish lad from the County of Tramore—
How I wish to God I had joined those men and with them gone on shore!

Well we robbed and plundered many ships, down on that Spanish Main,
Made many the widow and orphan there, in sorrow to complain,
For we forced them all to walk the plank, gave them a watery grave,
For the saying of our captain was that dead men tell no tales.

We cruised around that Spanish Sea, till a warship hove in view
And fired a shot across our bow, 'twas a signal to heave to.
We heeded not that warning shot, but flew before the wind,
Till a chain-shot struck our mizzin mast, and we soon fell behind.

So we cleared our decks for action, as the larger ship hove 'long side,
And soon upon our quarter deck, blood flowed like a crimson tide.
We fought till Captain Moore was killed, and eighteen of his men,
Till a bomb-shell set our ship on fire, we were forced to surrender then.

So back to Newgate I was brought, bound down in iron chains,
For the robbing and plundering of many ships down on that Spanish Main.
It was whisky and bad women, lad, that made a wreck of me,
So beware, young men, of what I say, and shun bad company.

WITH a story dealing with them in this issue, William M. McCoy tells us how he comes to know about Chinamen:

Los Angeles, Calif.

I always liked Chinamen. When they want to carve up some one they pick out another Chinaman for the carvee. That ought to suit any one who is not a Celestial. When I was the small boy problem of a California ranch, female "help" was unknown, and the Chink ranch cook was sort of *ex-officio* nurse girl. I am afraid one or two of them were rather busy, but everything I did was always just right. Later one of our cooks retired from the kitchen and opened a gambling-house in Chinatown, Los Angeles. There was plenty going on in Chinatown in those days, and I used to look Wong up every once in so often. He naturally took me over, under, and around Chinatown, and just as naturally I gained a little insight into how the Chinks feel, act, and work their schemes. They were always mighty white to me.—WILLIAM M. MCCOY.

YOU will remember that at our Mid-January Camp-Fire one of you appealed to all of us for a translation of a manuscript found in a bottle picked up on the seashore. Here are some of the responses that have come in and that should help to solve the mystery:

Yreka, Calif.

Since a few of the words are unquestionably Spanish, it is reasonable to suppose it all intended for Spanish, or its sister language, Portuguese. Sailors often have a smattering of both. It seems to have been written by a person who did not speak the tongue and spelled phonetically from dictation of one who could not write. Such combination was common enough in 1819, the date of the MS. Any

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one who has heard an illiterate speak in the foreign tongue, clipping many of his syllables, can hardly wonder at the spelling, if taken down from dictation, by a writer who did not understand what he was writing. From the account in *Adventure*, it appears that you were not sent the MS. itself, and that the two copies sent differed slightly. It might be that the letters of the MS., after a century, are not easily decipherable.

Original copy

VELET MANGE PAR DIOS DET NORTE ET ELVENGE PIROT
BURE DESIMGILD CAPITAN BLACKBURNE MDCCCXIX

Letters corrected

DET, possibly DEL
BURE, possibly BURKE
VENGE, possibly VENCE

Notes.

In such a MS. one would naturally expect a call for help or a story of lost treasure, and the idea might be misleading.

In such a language as Spanish, vowel sounds might be uncertain, but the consonants must be accounted for. In this translation the pronunciation will be considered that of an illiterate:

par Dios, *norte*, and *capitan*, are all plain Spanish properly spelled, and are such words as any one might be familiar with, whether he spoke the language or not.
mange and *venge*, words not easily mispronounced, are almost as plainly Spanish.
velet and *desimgild*, the first and last words, are the most obscure.

Taking the easiest words first:
par Dios, 'By God' A common oath.
del norte, 'of the north,' or "from the north.'
et, 'and.' Old Spanish form.
el, 'he.' Used for 'it.'
mange, for *manga*, a ' waterspout.'
venge, possibly *vence*, for *vencio*, 'vanquished,' 'overwhelmed.' The verb of the sentence.
The *o* would hardly be heard.
pirot, for *pirata*, 'a pirate.' The sound is represented almost perfectly, since it would be pronounced 'pirat,' the last syllable being clipped.
buke, for *buque*, 'a boat.'
velet, a word very difficult to make out. To the writer of the word it was probably velet, with the accent on the first syllable.
For *vuelta de*, 'a turn of,' pronounced 'velt'd,' the *d* assimilating with the *t* sound.
desimgild, for *d'-s'-m'-gell*, an illiterate's pronunciation of *de San Miguel*, 'of San Miguel.' The *d* at the end of the word may be accounted for by the accent on the last syllable, a consonantal strengthening of a doubtful sound.

Literal translation

A turn of a waterspout, by God, from the north, and he vanquished a pirate boat of San Miguel.

The last phrase sounds as though the MS. had been written by an observer, and not by a participant. Since an observer could hardly have cause to put the account into a bottle, while a participant might have such occasion, the last phrase is probably intended for "the pirate boat, San Miguel."

Translation

A whirl of a waterspout, by God, from the north, and it overwhelmed the pirate boat, *San Miguel*, Captain Blackburn, 1819.—J. B.

The next letter was addressed to Thomas Samson Miller of "Ask Adventure," through whom the mystery was brought to our attention. We have readers in at least one of the Guianas and have already heard from them at Camp-Fire.

Well, now he does not say that the bottle was found on the African Coast, and even if he did, that is no reason for supposing that it was written somewhere near Africa. The influence of the Spaniards extended all over the world. Now, to find some place where there is also Dutch influence, English influence and African dialect.

There may be many, but I think the most likely place is Paramaribo, capital of Guiana (Dutch), called Surinam. The natives there speak a dialect called "Taki-Taki," which is a mixture of English, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and some trace of African dialect. Doesn't this make your letter possible? If your magazine has any kind of a circulation in South America, or if Mr. X. W. could locate some one from South America, perhaps even from British Guiana, they could probably translate it for him.

If you care to find anything out about Dutch Guiana you might read the article in The National Geographic Magazine for June, 1907.—7999

The next came in handwriting which I'm not sure we in the office have deciphered correctly. It seems to be based on the idea that the message was written in script, for first this solution gives the words written in an illiterate hand and then, under each, the clearly written word which might have been intended instead of the one given in the form handed to us. But my understanding is that the message was printed out by letter. Here is the solution arrived at by "Thalatta," as he signs himself:

Follow Congo past divided mouths of Ubangi. Perish here Isangila.

He adds:

See Encyc. Brit.—Congo (exploration), Captain Tuckey's expedition, 1816.

So, knowing nothing about Captain Tuckey and little about the Congo, we looked it up. The encyclopedia says, in brief:

In 1816 the British Admiralty sent Captain J. K. Tuckey on an expedition to explore the Congo, sometimes known as the Zaire. The expedition reached the mouth of the river on the sixth of July, 1816, and managed to push up-stream as far as Isangila, beyond the lowest series of rapids; but sickness broke out, and the commander and sixteen

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other Europeans died, and the expedition had to return. Captain Tuckey and several of his companions are buried on Prince's Island. . . .

But Mr. Cox, who did the investigating, did it pretty thoroughly. Here are his findings:

This makes "Thallata's" solution seem extremely plausible. But other accounts of the expedition, chief among them Captain Tuckey's own journal, persuade me to believe for several reasons that the message is still unsolved. These reasons are:

1. Tuckey did not know the name Isangila, which is modern. In his journal he refers to the place as Sangalla.

2. The expedition began and ended within the year 1816. The date on the message was 1819. Thalatta passes gracefully over this.

3. Nor does Thalatta have anything to say about "Capitan Blackburne." No one of this name with the expedition.

4. No account of the expedition shows that it was ever in such straits as to make necessary the sending of messages in bottles. The party traveled mostly in a boat, with the best equipment that Europe at that time could furnish. Though seventeen men died, thirty-nine others came out alive. If need arose to communicate with the outside world, better means than bottles were at hand. So far as can be found, the only use Tuckey had for bottles was in dealing with the natives, who demanded these and many "fathoms" of cloth in trade for a scrawny chicken or two.

(Tuckey's exploration, by the way, was the first since the discovery of the river by a Portuguese, three centuries before.)

The next is an ingenious re-division of the words used:

Washington, D. C.

See page 181 "Camp-Fire" in *Adventure* of 1-18-19 as to "Velet Mange Par Dios Det Norte Et Elvenge Pirot Bure Desimgild Capitan Blockburne. MDCCCIX."

VE (we) let man Gepar di (die). O. S. Detvortee tel (say) VE (we) N. G. (no good). E (he is a) Pirot (Pirate). Bured (buried) Es (he) im (in) Gildcap. I tan block-Burne MDCCCXIX (probably some instruction as to numbers).—I. A. M'THERENT.

Here are some helpful suggestions:

Chicago.

As my wife has command of several languages, I asked her if she could help any. The following is the result. Hope it may help some.

Velet Mange Par
weather hurricane by
Dios Det Norte Et Elvenge
God. Within north and altitude

Velet, we think, is Spanish for "weather," but should be spelled *Velela;* a poor speller could very easily make the mistake. *Mange* should be *Manga*, supposing it to be Spanish. *Par* should be *Por*, to mean "by." *Dios* can also mean farewell. (I am not refering to *Adios*.)

Det Norte et elvenge.

The above four words are taken from Portuguese; the word *Elvenge* has the same meaning in Spanish ("Elevation").

Pirot Bure Desimgild pronounced as *Perowt Bwhoray Day-seem Khill* (as in "kill") my wife tells me is a man's name. The word *tempo* is Spanish for "weather," but among seafaring people *Velela* is used. Hoping this will be of some assistance.—WALTER F. SULLIVAN.

No, the riddle isn't finally solved, though at least one of the offered solutions goes a long way, but certainly progress has been made and perhaps, with the clues uncovered thus far, some others of you can run it down.

CONCERNING his story in this issue a word from Barry Scobee:

San Antonio, Texas.

The story "The Rawhiders," was written on the foundation of actual characters and interpretations of my own. I knew two men in the U. S. Army, in my company, who were pals yet were in real fear of each other. This fear came from their eternal rawhiding of each other. Each longed to hand the other the stiffest kind of verbal punches yet were afraid to go beyond defined limits. One threatened to smash the other in the face so as to leave a mark, and the other retorted that he would kill the person that smashed him in the face. They actually kept arms handy, and watched each other—except when they went out together, or were journeying with a third person, then they stood by loyally.

I TOOK those two for the story, and added this: A man who takes himself too seriously, pours out the things in his heart, then can't stand a little joking about it, is in the way to be ragged and rawhided. If he can't stand joking he shouldn't pour out what's in his heart. Let him keep his innermost thoughts to himself, or let him be able to laugh with others at his idiosyncrasies—let him see the humorous side of things, even himself. A man should cultivate the practise of taking jibes lightly, answering good naturedly, never quarreling. He can do all that and still have his fine convictions, his good character—in other words, be a man. To quote the truism, it is what a man does and not what he says that counts in the long run.

I KNEW a man in my company who had been a railroader before he enlisted. He served three years, then "re-ed-up" in the company I was in. He told windy stories of times when he was a freight brakeman running big trains out of Omaha. His refrain was, "And I gave 'em the highball." Men of company got to singing out in his presence, "Give 'em the highball." The man couldn't take it lightly. He had put himself in a ridiculous position by his too-much talk on a subject that lay in his heart. He took himself seriously. He couldn't turn the rawhiding aside, and he couldn't stand it. So he went over the hill—became a deserter and I haven't heard of him to this day.—BARRY SCOBEE.

A WOMAN comrade, with the spirit of adventure strong in her and an interesting word to say about it:

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Birmingham, Ala.

How I enjoy the Camp-Fire letters! I feel as if talking with friends, for I love adventure, but for the last seventeen years have been a hearth-stone adventurer.

In regards to Indians, Chief Red Cloud was a dearly beloved friend of my childhood and girlhood days, also had the honor (?) of partaking of heap good dog stew at the teepee of Sitting-Bull. I have photos of several Indians and my mother has in her possession photos of the battle-ground of Wounded Knee, of Red Cloud, Chief Sitting-Bull, also Jack Red Cloud.

I think the spirit of adventure is one of the greatest gifts of mankind. As it gives one the ability to be happy with very little of this world's goods, a courage to face trouble and to be unafraid of death. At least I have found it so.—MRS. C. MEYER.

THIS comrade tried for four years to get into the Army but like many others was barred by physical disability. However, that's not what he's talking about. He's speaking very frankly and on a subject worth listening to:

Detroit, Mich.

When I first came to "the States" three years ago I didn't appreciate the privileges this country allows strangers.

WHEN one is raised in one of England's colonies one is generally very, almost rabidly, I might say, pro-English and, with the narrow-mindedness peculiar to those who have seen only one thing all their lives, I couldn't see what you Americans saw in this country that was so very wonderful. One of the reasons, I think, that made me antagonistic to America was the fact that at that time German propaganda was spreading round to the effect that England was fighting with Frenchmen and using the men of her Colonies to fight with, while Englishmen stayed home and drank tea. Of course, being British, I couldn't see that for a minute.

When I'd go to the theaters and hear the Stars and Stripes applauded with cheers and hand-claps I used to wonder what you people could see in a flag like that. You see, I didn't know what it stood for then and it looked tawdry to me, being used to the Union-jack.

ONE night at my rooming-house some one asked me if the wheat produced in the Canadian Northwest compared favorably with American wheat. I said it did, in fact it was a better grade than can be grown here. It wasn't a boast about Canada but simply a fact as I understood it. An old Kentuckian was at the table and he put down his fork and glared at me and said:

"You seem to think a lot of Canada?"

"I do," I said.

"Well, why in —— don't you go back there, then?"

Of course I didn't have any answer, but that question made me think some. I met a number of good Americans shortly after that and I came to understand what the Stars and Stripes really stands for. I began to ask myself questions like this "What right had I to take the protection of the United States flag, unless I stood up for it when it needed me?" "What right had I to live here and bawl out the country that was feeding me?" Well, there was no answer, and I can say that I felt pretty —— cheap, a rather rotten variety of carp.

SINCE that time, I've seen things in a new light and I'm glad to say and proud to say that the Stars and Stripes looks good to me and I'm willing to scrap for her any old time when she needs me, if she'll take me. I think a citizen of any country should place that country before all and until such time as I can put the United States before all I shall not take out my papers. I can stand up and say truthfully that I'm not a backbiter any more. I think the reason I was at one time was because I didn't look at things from the American point of view. I also think foreigners grab at the idea that this is a "free country" and that their support to the Government isn't necessary. I think that each one should be made to understand that he should give that support.—ALLEN STUART REID.

WHEN I wrote Mr. Reid to make sure he would have no objection to my using his letter in "Camp-Fire" I received the reply given below. Though there are at times good and sufficient reasons for not signing one's own name to a published communication, in general I'm inclined to agree with the old hunter:

I'm afraid my letter will prove a very poor "article," for my ideas, as I remember, were very badly brought out. That is the only objection I have to your publishing my letter, and if you do, you may sign my name, of course.

As the old hunter said: "If a man ain't got guts enough ter stand up fer his own principles, he ain't worth a ——."—ALLEN STUART REID.

AS SEVERAL of you have asked Camp-Fire to tell you about old pistols or guns in your possession, it occurred to me that some of you might be able to tell me about a small sword that a friend found in a second-hand dealer's shop in Piqua, Ohio, and gave to me some eighteen years ago. A cut follows, showing general shape, and another showing design covering base of blade for about six inches, same design on both sides. The words above the figure are "Vivat Bandur," but I have never found any one who could tell me who Bandur was, or when and where the weapon was used or anything else about it.

It is 22½ inches over all, the blade being 17½ inches in length. The handle is some strongly and straight grained wood, mounted at the ends with what looks like brass; brass hilt and butt of handle decorated rather crudely with a running design of flowers, one of six pointed petals, the other consisting of two concentric circles

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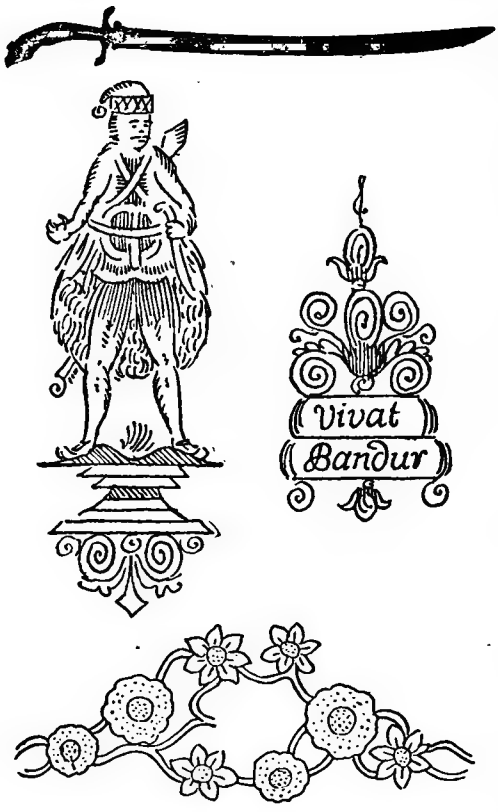
with whole flower covered with dots, an evident attempt to indicate a densely double flower of some kind. A small decoration on each side of middle of hilt (both



sides) seems a conventional design indicating nothing in particular. Butt of handle is shaped to imitate a deer's foot.

Can any of you identify it?

HERE is a bright thing done by me. In the May third issue I gave you the autobiographical talk of Everett Saunders and tacked on to it the name of E. S. Pladwell. Don't know how it happened but it did. In the proof Mr. Saunders' name was at the end while my introductory paragraph mentioned Mr. Pladwell. Possibly the printer's proof-reader noted the discrepancy and changed one name to agree with the other. More likely I did it myself. Those of you who've read proof know how easily such stupidities creep in. I didn't realize my break until I received the following from Mr. Pladwell:

Oakland, Cal.

Since reading my biography in the latest *Adventure* my friends are now convinced that I am leading a double life.

APPARENTLY I have become a remarkable example of the transmogrification of souls. That is, while being an Oakland newspaper man, my soul or alter ego or something was prowling about Oreana, Nevada, and this second-soul has among other things become married without my knowledge or consent, leaving me somewhat upset, naturally.

I am more than interested; I am excited. Have I any children? Can the wife sue me for non-support? If so, can she collect for many years back? Is she blonde or brunette? How has she worried along while my real self has been on the Great White Way of Oakland, California? Has my spectral self run up any debts? If so, can they be traced to Oakland? More important, has he made any money? If so, can I collect?

Kidding aside, though, I was much surprised to see this biography, which must have had names switched somehow. Mine was in *Adventure* many moons ago. I will gladly subscribe, however, to some of the thoughts in the article, as I think them rather good. I wonder whose biography it is?—E. S. PLADWELL.

THE best way I know of squaring things is to give you Mr. Saunders' talk again, but this time over his own name. Here it is. With my apologies to all concerned.

Oreana, Nevada.

I was born on a ranch in Eastern Oregon, October 9, 1892. The only breaks in the continuity of my existence since then occurred when I stopped a quick-breaking in-shoot with my solar plexus, and again when I ducked into a right hook and had my nose pushed across to a painful position under my right eye.

NATURALLY, having passed the greater part of my life in a cattle country, I have seen branding-irons smoke and heard the hoarse bellows of calves put under the knife and hot iron ever since I can remember. I have seen horses, with the fear of the wild captured thing in their eyes, struggling against the ropes, and have seen them go into the air under the terrifying saddle and rider. Though personally (the demands of truth force me to an unwilling confession) I am no better rider than the imaginary *Spike Ellis* in "The Silver Saddle," I have a pretty thorough first-hand knowledge of the thrills incidental to the mounting of a cayuse. I also know what it is to lose step with him, fall a jump behind, reach for leather, and grab two handfuls of sand or bunchgrass—or anything that might happen to constitute the earth formation in that vicinity.

I GOT through high school at Baker, Oregon, and had my fling at scholastic athletics, also long-winded old Cicero and that brain-staggering invention of Euclid called geometry. I attended the University of Oregon for a year and a half before deciding that I knew enough to make the old world sit up and take notice of me. Then I quit school and got married, and soon, like George Ade, fastened my fraternity pin on my undershirt and admitted to myself that there were several things that had not come thoroughly under my notice.

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AT VARIOUS times I have done other things besides ranch, go to school and wonder how O. Henry and Jack London could get so much kick from plain facts. I worked for a while with a topographical engineering party, and with a railroad engineering party. I bucked wood for a donkey at a big lumber camp near Kelso, Washington. I mucked for two weeks with a railroad construction gang, and though I then had plenty of that way of earning an honest living, I saw more disillusioning facts in the every-day events of those two weeks than a year at college could build up.

One incident in particular convinced me that the Mexicans might under certain conditions be hard to beat. It was one morning at breakfast. A big American and a little greaser got into a senseless dispute about the passing of a plate of bread. The Mexican slashed out with a knife and laid the big fellow's face open. His opponent caught up a gallon capacity granite-ware pitcher of condensed milk by the handle and tried to beat off the Mexican's head. All he did, however, was to spoil his appetite. The Mexican worked that day. The other called for his time and left the camp so as not to furnish more temptation for that knife.

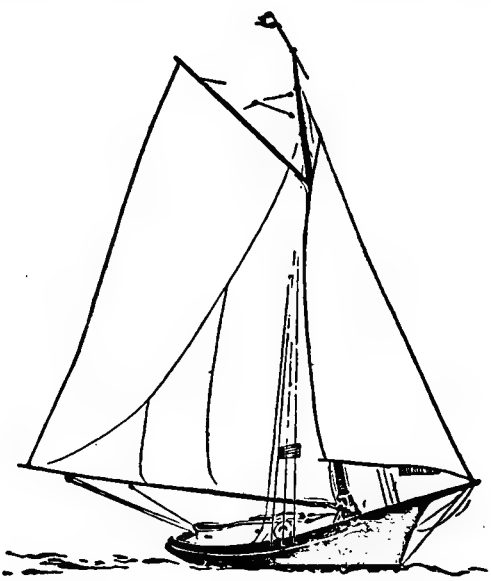
I SOLD enlarged pictures in Oregon and California, and quit because I couldn't lie convincingly enough to satisfy my own conscience, though I was doing fairly well with the "gullible public." I have never ridden the rods, but have made several hundred miles on top and on the blinds. If any one doubts that clothes don't make the man, let him get his coat turned wrong side out (to keep the conventional exterior of it clean) and his eyes rimmed with coal smoke, and look from the rock bottom up into our social order.

I have mucked a good many thousand dollars worth of ore for various mining companies. One night, on the graveyard shift in an incline shaft, I stepped back to roll a smoke. Three seconds afterward a ton of rhyolite fell out of the hanging wall and crashed down on the spot I had recently occupied. The edge of the cave-in caught the machine man's leg. I lifted a few boulders off his foot. He looked up and grinned. "Uncle Sam came —— near losing a good soldier," he said.

IT IS needless to say that my unconventional and floating-laborer activities were confined to my pre-nuptial days. Since December 19, 1914, I have been rather unflaggingly busy trying to get by. It was partly through a desire to escape the menace of the muck-stick (shovel being used symbolically for all manner of tools designed for the use of those of us who haven't both hands full of the Top Rung), and partly due to an ardent desire I have always had to learn to tell a good story well, that I began trying my hand at writing a few months ago.

I have felt humble when reading in the "Camp-Fire" of men who have lived more in a year than I have in ten. And I have felt humble while talking with men over real camp-fires whose experiences dwarf my pitiable ones to kindergarten affairs in comparison. But I must admit, with a trace of shame, that my "ardent desire" aforementioned always appears, corrupting my humbleness, which has been divinely commended, with covetousness, which is condemned. I covet that man's experience and think, if I had seen so much, felt so keenly, read so deeply in the "open books of life and death," what glorious tales could I tell! And yet, strange to say, I often doubt if I should endanger O. Henry's place in the story world even if I had seen the Klondike stampede.—EVERETT SAUNDERS.

FOLLOWING is a drawing made from a photograph of *Gauntlet*, the sloop in which our comrade Captain A. E. Dingle made his adventurous single-handed voyage



from New York to Bermuda, as narrated in his article in this issue.

Camp-Fire Buttons

AS BRIEFLY announced at our last meeting, the Camp-Fire buttons are now ready for delivery. Any one who wishes belongs to our Camp-Fire, the only requisite being an interest in the things in which the rest of us are interested. The buttons are designed to indicate this common interest so that we can recognize each other when we meet in far places or at home. Any one with this common interest is entitled to apply for a badge.

They cost us a fraction over twenty-one cents each in thousand lots from the manufacturer and one will be sent to you for twenty-five cents, which covers handling, stationery, pasteboard container and postage on the button to any part of the world. In other words, we are charging, only what is practically the cost price and making it a round number.

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AS ALREADY explained, the button is enameled in gold-washed setting, screw-back, round, three-eighth inch in diameter. Three bands of color—blue, brown and green, for sky, earth and sea. The number seventy-one appears in gold on the middle band, representing the letters of the word "Camp-Fire" when each is given its numerical order in the alphabet and the results added together. Nothing else appears on the button.

We here in the office are immensely pleased with it, for it seems to us neat, in good taste and the kind of thing one can wear anywhere. We hope—and believe—that you will like it as well as we do.

So pretty soon you can begin keeping an eye out for men with the "seventy-one" button showing in their lapels.

ON RECEIPT of his first letter I hoped he would keep his threat and send us some of the interesting tales he has tucked away in his memory. And he did. After an extract from his first letter comes a later one with interesting data on the Custer massacre:

Merrick, Okla.

The story of Jesse James being alive in Los Angeles, reminded me that I was one of the first dozen people who saw him lying dead with a hole through his head from the assassin's bullet. This was April 1, 1882, in St. Joe, Mo. I have since lived neighbor to Frank James. I expect to be in Abilene, Kansas, this Spring and hope to be able to correct Robert V. Carr's description of Wild Bill's personal appearance. I have wandered up and down some distance from the creek's mouth and sometimes, if time and inclination should synchronize, I may hand in something that might be of interest to *Adventure's* readers.

Merrick, Okla.

During several years of my knocking about I had the job of buying horses for the Cheyenne Indian Agent located at Colony, Okla., and became well acquainted with John Otter, a full blood Cheyenne. He was and is foreman of the Indian farm at Colony, Four years before the opening of Oklahoma to settlement he was on the Indian Police force working out of Ft. Reno, located six miles Northwest of the present city of El Reno, Okla.

During one of our trips he asked me if I had ever heard the Indian version of Custer's last fight. I had not. I give it here just as he told it to me:

EVER since Custer's massacre of the Cheyenne band—men, women and children—on the Wachita River about ten miles from the present town of Strong City, Okla., the Indians had lived in hopes of sometime meeting him in battle, and, contrary to general opinion, they not only had no fear of him but longed for the opportunity to get at him. It came when their outriding scouts reported that Custer (Long Hair) had detached himself and a small company from the main command and was riding their way. The Indians sent a small band instructed to ride into plain view of Custer and, if Custer attacked, to retreat. They bet on his doing just as he did. The band led him into the center of 5,000 Sioux and Cheyenne. Each and every warrior engaged was instructed under no circumstances to kill Custer. He was to be taken alive and reserved for torture, which was to be skinning alive. To this day no Indian has ever been heard to make the claim of the killing and their tribe lore is that Custer finding his life spared seemingly miraculously, sensed the why and ended his own life.—F. K. WILLIS, M. D.

HERE is a dramatic personal story from history, sent in to us by D. Wiggins a long time ago, before he went into the Army, and, like many another good letter, left in the big pile of Camp-Fire correspondence till I could dig down to it and find a place for it in our pages:

Salem, Oregon.

Yes, there *was* "A Man Without a Country," and he was likewise the Father of Oregon.

DOCTOR JOHN McLAUGHLIN was the factor of the H. B. C. (the boys call it the "Here Before Christ") in the Northwest territory in the days when the first of the pioneers were pushing the borderland to the Coast. He had more power, in all probability, than even our President possesses today. His word was law in Oregon, Washington and a large part of Idaho, Montana and Wyoming.

When the gaunt, hollow-eyed Yankees came drifting down the river and tied up their boats at the bank under the trading-post at Oregon City, which the Doctor founded, his duty to his employers was to have sent them out of the country with all speed, encouraging the red men to harrass them a little to encourage their going. But he was a man before all else.

Although he well knew that this was the forerunner of the horde that was to win the Northwest land for America, he gave the newcomers welcome; he sold them the food and the supplies they needed to begin the task of carving a home from the wilderness. (And right here I am going to say most emphatically that "carving" is the right term. Out here a man has to remove from thirty-nine to four hundred and seventeen stumps from every acre before he can put a plow point into the soil. A man pays for this land and then works for it.)

WELL, Doctor John, as he was familiarly called, was a close friend to the new-comers, and but for him I don't think Doctor Whitman's famous ride would have been of much value.

And then the Hudson's Bay Company learned of what their factor was doing. And the ax fell with vigor. Doctor John was ousted from his high estate, and was not even recognized as a British subject by the majority of his countrymen.

He never took out American citizenship papers, but lived and died as did *Philip Nolan*, but regarded in a far different light. We of the Northwestern States consider him as standing alone among the great men of history—he threw away wealth, position and power for the sake of a few ragged,

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privation-worn Americans. For he certainly knew what his employers would do to the man who did not eject the invaders of their empire.

HE PASSED away in his home in Oregon City, and lies under the wall of the Catholic church in that town. It's a sleepy, drowsy old town, lying along the river bank, but no town of the Northwest, except Astoria, has such glorious memories.

Doctor John's home still stands on the hill, and I was recently in the room that served as his office, where he passed over to his reward. No foreigner he, but a true American.—D. WIGGINS.

A LETTER from G. A. Wells, of our writers' brigade, with a word about New Zealand and Haiti:

New Albany, Ind.

In "Ask Adventure," issue of February third, I read with great interest Mr. Finnegan's letter of inquiry concerning the opportunities in New Zealand, and also Mr. Mills' reply. It appears that the latter gentleman is very enthusiastic about New Zealand, and from what I know of the place he is right in being so. I was lucky enough to make the cruise with the battle fleet that went around the world a dozen years ago, and we stopped several days at Auckland. I was writing travel articles for several newspapers at the time and naturally it was my business to "get next" to all that was interesting about the places we visited.

I WOULD like to add my unqualified approval of Mr. Mills' attitude toward New Zealand. Of course he knows much more about the country than I could learn in the few days I was there, but I saw enough to make me think of it as an annex of the so-called God's country. I should say that there is as much opportunity there as there is here in the States, though success in any line and in most places depends almost altogether upon the efforts of the man seeking success. If the sheriff ever chases me away from here I think I shall go to either New Zealand or Hawaii, with Colorado as a third choice.

And by the way, just outside of Auckland a few miles is an extinct volcano that stands alone in the midst of a beautiful farming country. It is shaped very similar to a gigantic bowl, and the sides and bottom are covered with grass that would, I believe, shame Kentucky's famous blue grass. It was this hill that gave me the idea for the location of my story, "The Madness of Johnny Dyer," that appeared in an earlier issue of *Adventure*.

THERE is also another letter of inquiry in this department and in the same issue that interests me. Mr. Bent wants to know about Haiti, and Captain Dingle makes haste to reply in effect: "Good ——, man! Don't touch Haiti with a thousand-mile pole!" My actual acquaintance with the island is limited to reading extensively about it, though I have been close enough to it two or three times to hit it with a rock. However, I have a brother who is marooned in the jungles of Cuba with half a dozen soldiers of fortune, one of whom is an engineer and who spent several years in Haiti. This gentleman speaks of it as a "—— of a place for a white man." A white man has no more chance there than a mongrel at a bench-show. All advice to the white man is to stay away. If one hasn't a black skin one is a pup with the mange. This knowledge, of course, comes third-hand, but I think it is sound. I merely wish to add what little I know of the place to keep a compatriot from getting stung in a foreign land, for I have been stranded thusly myself and know what it means for a man to be several thousand miles away from home among strangers and have but a few dollars in his jeans.—G. A. WELLS.

LOOKING AHEAD FOR DEMOCRACY

IN THE last issue the "New Creed for Americans" was given. In it was stated: "The governing principle of democracy is that all shall act as one and that the course of that one shall be decided by the will of the greatest possible number of those who compose it." One point in this should have been amplified, as was done in previous issues. In one sense majority rule does not express the "will of the greatest possible number." Majority rule should be supplemented and modified by minority representation in delegated power, thus not leaving a minority, that might be forty-nine per cent. of the total, without voice and vote on concrete measures.

THE whole question of minority rights is vital. Majority rule is only a crude approximation to working democracy. Carried to its logical, abstract extreme it can abolish democracy itself,

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but the essential purpose of democracy is to give each individual the fullest personal liberty consonant with the welfare of the group, and the individual really enters into a democracy because it offers the best practical machinery for ensuring personal liberty. If that machinery abolishes itself, it abolishes the reason for the individual's allegiance and, on a basis of fundamental right, he is absolved from his civic bargain.

A sufficient majority can compel the minority to obedience to a specific law, yet under democracy the minority has the recourse of attempting to convince enough of the majority to effect a repeal. But if the majority takes away democracy itself the minority is made a helpless slave.

In other words, the majority can compel the minority to anything except the loss of democracy—can set up a monarchy or what it pleases, but can not compel the minority to live under it or to give up their individual rights because of it.

THAT is the abstract consideration. The practical concrete point is that the rights and voice of the minority must be protected against submersion under the majority by all possible machinery such as a three-fourths instead of a bare majority vote for a Constitutional amendment, minority representation, and so forth. But the real protection can be attained only by democracy itself, not by any of its machinery. And democracy itself is an attitude of mind in the people themselves.

THERE is nothing to be added. So far as I personally am concerned, I have done my little "bit" by putting before you the results of what I have been able to work out during some eleven years. I can do nothing more except to continue preaching, in one way or another, the doctrine of democracy as I see it. But this series of talks is finished. The rest lies with you.

A definite program of action has been offered. Except for Bolshevism and Socialism it is the only comprehensive *constructive* program offered Americans against the crisis in their internal affairs that surely approaches. It is up to you. If you do not agree with this program for democracy, that is your right. But if you do agree, then only one self-respecting course is open to you—action. Do *your* share in the concerted action set for June twenty-fifth. Call public meetings. Organize Tens.

The general result will be nothing or much. It depends on the American people themselves. And you are one of them. If you prefer merely to let things drift as they have been doing, all right, but then be ready later on to take your medicine without whimpering when the spoon is jammed into your mouth.

ARE you just waiting for some one else to take hold of things and do the work you know should be done? We've been waiting for that for quite a number of years and—no one else has done it for us.

Just waiting for a leader? What do you need of a leader? You are an American, aren't you, not a serf who can't think or act without help? Be your own leader.

DO YOU approve the program as a whole but hold back because some part or detail of it does not fit into your own ideas? The whole is the important thing, not the part. Any whole that is comprehensive and big enough to stand on its own feet must be composed of many parts. How long do you think it will be before somebody presents a program every part and detail of which will exactly suit a majority of the individuals in this country? If you must wait for that, then you'd better arrange with your grandchildren to take up the job of waiting when you pass out of the picture. The parts have no value in themselves. Only as parts of a whole. It is the whole that is important. Which will you sacrifice?

Do your part. Act. Sow the seed. Start the machinery. Neither you nor I can remake the nation by individual effort. But it must be remade and it can not be unless you and I and the rest of us do each his little part. We can not, even all of us, remake overnight what has been a century in forming, but if it takes a generation there is all the more need of making a start as soon as possible.

WILL you merely go on complaining and drifting? Or will you *do* something? We have poured out blood on the battle-field to "make the world safe for democracy." But we know that it is not yet safe. And who will make democracy safe for the world? Some one else? Sometime? Maybe? Maybe not? And you—are you merely a waiting parasite and helpless complainer? Or is it your world too, and your democracy?

DEMOCRACY is a living thing, open to death or life in every minute of its existence. Do you think it is some miraculous flower that will bloom forever because of something our ancestors did a century or a century and a half ago? Those were great years, 1776, 1812, 1865 and the rest, but no one of them is 1919.

And how about 1920 and 1930 and 1950? Do you owe your children nothing? If you are so strong for inheriting from your forefathers, hasn't it occurred to you that you yourself are a forefather with the same obligation to posterity?

ARE you waiting for a magic remedy, a marvelous formula (from "some one else") that will miraculously set all things right? There is no such remedy or formula, and never will be. That kind of miracle must be made out of sweat. There is no magic wand. Neither Bolshevism nor any other glittering formula can suddenly sweep us into perfection. And if we don't *work* for half-way perfection almost any "remedy," glittering or otherwise, can sweep us into ruin.

BE AN American, a shaper of your own fate. Or be helpless chaff to be swept away by the winds of change—by "some one else."

Call your meetings. Organize your Tens. Send in your report of what you will do June twenty-fifth, your report of what you have already accomplished. On these reports we are dependent for the general publicity necessary to give such a movement national scope and a quick spread. With these reports in hand, that general publicity follows almost automatically.

Enlist the best men of your vicinity. Start your local publicity. Keep clear of party or class influence or appearance of influence. This is democracy.

Send no money now, but state the amount you will give to the movement if it develops as planned.

But above all—*work, report.* Or drift. A. S. H.

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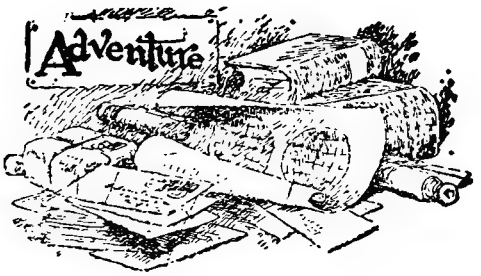

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Dutch, Portuguese, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application*. We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *postpaid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL SELL: First September, 1918, to Mid-May, 1919. Eighteen in all. Fifteen cents each, or two dollars for the lot, including postage.—EDISON EWING, 57 Gilmour St., Ottawa, Canada.

WILL SELL: May, 1911; December, 1914; April, June, July, 1915; April, May, July, Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., Dec., 1916; 1917 complete except First Nov.; 1918 complete except Mid-March and Mid-Dec. State price.—R. W. MCAULIFFE, Box 115, Morristown, New York.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 1833 S St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Cove Cottage, Pembroke West, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
B. W. BRINTNALL, 5527 Thirty-third Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Cove Cottage, Pembroke West, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brintnall.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Orlando, Fla. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
CAPT.-ADJ. JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially* early history of Missouri Valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
JOHN B. THOMPSON, P. O. Box 1374, St. Louis, Mo. Covering Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber sections.

9. Western U. S. Part 1
E.E.HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

10. Western U. S. Part 2 and Mexico Part 1
(Editor to be appointed.) Covering Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

11. Mexico Part 2 Southern
EDGAR YOUNG, 84 Court St., Brooklyn, N. Y. Covering that part of Mexico lying south of a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, commerce.

12. North American Snow Countries Part 1
(Editor to be appointed.) Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin, a strip of Ontario between Minn. and C. P. Ry. Canoes and snow-shoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

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13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

15. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

17. North American Snow Countries. Part 6
H. S. BELCHER, The Hudson's Bay Company, Ft. Alexander, Manitoba, Canada. Covering Manitoba, Saskatchewan, MacKenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

18. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, Honolulu, T. H. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

19. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, 84 Court Street, Brooklyn, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

20. South America. Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, 84 Court St., Brooklyn, N. Y. Covering Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile; geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

21. South America. Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Covering Venezuela, The Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

22. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

23. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Maine. Covering Japan: Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

24. Russia and Eastern Siberia
CAPTAIN A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Quartermaster, U. S. Troops, Mercedes, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

25. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Eagle Bird Mine, Washington, Nevada Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

26. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

27. ★ Africa Part 3 Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunno, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

28. ★ Africa Part 4 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo.
CHARLES BEADLE, 7 Place de Tertre, Paris, XVIII, France. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

29. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

30. Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, 424 Black Bldg., Los Angeles, Cal. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shot-guns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shot-Guns (including foreign and American makes.) J. B. THOMPSON, Box 1374, St. Louis, Mo.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, Box 1374, St. Louis, Mo. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agrl., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen. Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

The following "Ask Adventure" editors are now serving in our military forces. We hope you will be patient if their answers are at times delayed: Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson; Capt. A. M. Lochwitzky.

Tropical Prospecting

SUCH unusual interest has been manifested in tropical prospecting that Edgar Young has prepared the following monograph which covers the subject thoroughly:

IT IS well for one who intends going on a prospecting-trip for gold in any country to familiarize himself with the rudiments of geology, and also with the physical appearance of other valuable metallic ores, such as silver, copper, platinum, lead, zinc, iron, manganese, nickel, cobalt, mercury, tin, tungsten, uranium, vanadium, chromium, arsenic, antimony, bismuth, etc. Specimens

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of these metallic ores may be seen in museums, and many of the larger schools of mining boast of a large collection.

Another thing that the average prospector overlooks is to acquaint himself with precious and semi-precious stones as they exist in their native state. A very little study on the subject might prove to be worth thousands of dollars. There are many books published on crystallography, most of them showing plates of stones in the matrix, which may be consulted at the larger public libraries. New York and Brooklyn have hundreds of books dealing with prospecting and mining in all its phases, but a great many of these are technical and of little use to the ordinary man. For the amateur I would suggest the three following books:

"Prospecting for Gold and Silver," by Arthur Lakes, published in 1895 by The Colliery Engineer Co., of Scranton, Pennsylvania.

"The World's Minerals," by Leonard J. Spencer, Frederick A. Stokes Co., New York, 1916.

"A Book of Precious Stones," by Julius Wodiska, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1909.

There are doubtless other books just as good as these, but they have not come to my notice. A letter addressed to the mineral department of any of the larger museums asking for suggestions as to best books to consult should bring a reply, also the editors of the mining magazines and journals are familiar with the best books on the subject. However, the three books named above with a slight knowledge of chemistry such as is to be gained from an elementary school text book, and a liberal supply of common sense, will put a man a long way toward knowing metals and gems when he sees them in their native state.

It is not my intention to go into a lengthy treatise (and expose my ignorance) concerning the geology of the earth's crust, mineralogy, gemology, and the allied sciences. Men have grown very bald writing heavy volumes of this kind. My aim is to give in a few well-chosen paragraphs the practical experience I have gleaned by prospecting in this country and in Latin America.

There are over six hundred tons of pure gold taken from the earth each year, and it is to be found in every land on the earth's surface, and in the bottom of every sea, but the most I, personally, found in one year would not value over a few hundred dollars. The largest nugget I ever found was near Keswick, California. It was shaped like a small ax. I sold it to the baggage agent in Keswick station for a trifle over two dollars. A man in the creek-bed just below the station found one a few days later that was as large as a marble. An ancient patriarch located a pocket in the same cañon I was in and took out over fifteen hundred dollars' worth of nuggets and dust.

And in just such facts as these lies the fascination to prospecting. A man can work harder, and faster, and longer for less money when he is getting a few "colors" than at anything else in the world. It is rainbow-chasing with a vengeance. And the pot o' gold is so near that you can almost touch it.

So much for the gold lust and the psychology of the gold hunting game. And in scrambling after gold they pass up rich mines of other metals which would net them fortunes. Had I known as much then as I know now I would have entered the Panama Canal Zone a rich man instead of a frayed pauper.

I have taken the trouble to find out what every precious stone looks like in the matrix and I know all of the principal minerals by sight. That is part of the experience I gained in making the long overland hike from Mexico to the zone.

The first thing for the prospective prospector to get located in his cranium so that it will never be forgotten is the fact that the earth's surface as we now see it is not the same as it has always been. Mountains have upheaved, even in very recent years, in the middle of valleys, and carried river bottoms to the very tops and left them there. Volcanoes have poured forth lava and turned rivers from their courses. Lakes have dried up. Land has come up out of the sea and land has sunk into the sea. Continents have been joined together that were formerly separate islands.

I dug up prehistoric sharks' teeth as large as my two fists with a locomotive crane and a clam-shell bucket in the bottom of Culebra cut. I have found petrified fish in the stones of mountains several thousand feet high. It is facts such as these that make a failure of the "high-boot" technical man when he goes out to prospect.

It is almost invariably the dub who locates the rich bonanzas. He locates them by going to just where they shouldn't be and finding them there. It is very easy to explain how they got there after they are once found. This is just where the geologist comes in handy. He can read the story as plain as if it were typed there. But on the surface things were disguised so well that no man could tell without digging down to find out.

I would be a fool to try to discredit geologists in general. In fact, I am not trying to discredit them. I am stating a well-known fact and the first one to corroborate it would be the geologist himself.

"Gold's where you find it." That's an adage as old as prospecting. You will hear it in every language in the world and in every part of the world, for prospecting for gold is so old that we find records of it carved on the most ancient monoliths that have been deciphered. Consequently, while it is well to know some geology it is just as well to treat geology with a small grain of salt as you go along, so far as prospecting for gold is concerned.

The mother rock or matrix of gold differs in various parts of the world. In some places it is a white quartz with the gold running through it in veins, or in thin weblike sheets; in others, as in the Transvaal, it is a hard conglomerate of quartz and other material cemented together, with the gold appearing in tiny particles throughout the mass; while in other places it is found in metalliferous veins, associated with iron pyrites, silver ore, and in chemical combinations with tellurium.

Consequently while it is fairly true that "gold-mining is confined to crystalline rocks of the Archæan age and porphyries associated with them" as is so often stated, there are many exceptions to the rule. It is well to state here that no absolutely pure native gold has ever been found. It is always associated with silver in the form of an alloy. The more silver it contains, the lighter the color. Pure gold is as soft as lead and is heavier than lead. The next heaviest substance is "black sand," the altered residue of iron pyrites which is almost invariably found in the vicinity of gold.

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Throughout the ages from time immemorial a ultitude of causes has brought the mother rocks of ıld to the surface, or torn them from their sur- ıundings, and subjected them to the action of the ements, or sunk them to the bottom of the sea. hose that sunk are gone so far as we are concerned r the present.

Those that remained in the atmosphere disinte- ated slowly but surely and freed the particles of ıld that were imprisoned within them, those that ent into the stream bottoms were dissolved and ound to dust by the action of the water and the ction of other stones rubbing against them. The ıtire inhomogeneous mass began moving from a gher to a lower level, impelled by water, and the tion of gravity.

The gold, being the heaviest, sought to travel at e very bottom of the mass. And due to this fact the cause of all placer mining. The bed-rock ıs uneven. It was full of crevices and pot-holes. ıe bottoms of the streams were also full of rock- ıund basins and dams of solid stone. The gold, ing on the very bottom, was caught and held ere, while the lighter material flowed over the p.

This process is going on at the present time and ıile it is true that millions of tons of gold have en washed into the bottoms of the oceans other illions of tons have been caught and held there to : discovered by man at some future time and di- rted to his own use. The separating this gold ım the sand and gravel which cover it consists in ıshing it with water, whereby the lighter materials e carried away with the water and the heavy gold mains. This is known as placer mining.

Prospecting for gold consists in locating the low ıons down which the gold has been washed by dless rains, digging to bed-rock and uncovering e gold-bearing sand and gravel. The gold found re is known as "free" gold because it has been ed from its mother rock. If the edges of the be-like crystals are sharp, and the jagged edges of rr-shaped bits show little wear, or parts of the iginal matrix are still clinging to the gold, it is a n that it has not "traveled" very far, and that e mother lode is not far above. Tracing upward ng the mountainside the prospector will find oats" or pieces of the original rock with the gold ll imbedded in it. And climbing farther yet he ll find the mother lode still in place. This is an al case, for sometimes there are no "floats" and e mother rock has entirely disappeared.

Almost all placer gold is very smooth and polished ım traveling long distances over the rocks. The ion I have cited is an ideal cañon, and has always mained in its place, and hasn't been upheaved top of a mountain or turned sideways down o a valley, or been the subject of other disturb- ces.

These facts are what make prospecting a fasci- ting game. While it is a fact that rich placer ound is to be found in the bottoms of present de- essions noted bonanzas have been struck in "high rs" and in the sand and gravel overlying bed- ck which was once the bottom of streams. It is rtling in what unlikely places these are to be und. Consequently the field of the prospector is a de one.

A man starting out to prospect in the tropics ould outfit as follows:

"Poll" pick, shovel, drills, hammer, blasting-powder, fuse, gold-pan, horn spoon, iron spoon, (big, to melt metal in over fire), magnifying-glass, jewelers' scales, compass, field-glasses, horse-shoe magnet, matches in air-tight containers, frying-pan, coffee-pot, tin cup, pot, knife, fork and spoon, jerked beef, flour, beans, coffee, (or tea), salt (plenty), pepper, baking-powder, a change of khaki clothing, extra socks, shirt, bandanna handkerchiefs, rubber shoes, shoe soles and nails, rubber poncho, light woolen blanket, pneumatic pillow, tent-top, hobbles for mule or burro, bars of solder, soldering-iron, acid, needles and thread, soap, razor, scissors, large bottle of quinine, salts, permanganate of potash, bluestone, (for tropical sores), and a few other standard medicines.

Everything that water will affect must be protected from it by soldering into containers. Five-gallon gasoline cans are good for sealing many articles in one can. In addition medicines should be sealed with wax.

The guns a man should carry depend on what each man prefers should he carry his own ammunition. Due to the fact that the following calibers are easy to get cartridges for in the larger towns and cities I would suggest a .38 standard Smith & Wesson or Colt's revolver, .30-30 carbine, either Winchester or Marlin, and a .22 long for a table-gun. It is well to take a large supply of this last caliber in with you.

If you know how to use reloading-tools get a set and take them also. They may be obtained from Montgomery, Ward & Co., or some other large mail-order house, and cost but little.

Rain and ants are to be protected against. The rains are heavier on the Atlantic side all the way down through the tropics. On the Pacific side it rains no more than it does here.

Take a roll of mosquito netting besides a net for spreading over you at night. It will come in handy. We have had to outfit heavier than we would have done in the "States."

We would get to the country we had headed for by the method we had picked, either coming down by boat to one of the coast ports and going up the river as far as possible on a river steamer, and then hiring canoe men to take us up as far as the last native town, where we could buy burros, or mules, and then throw our packs on one or two as the case might be according to the size of our loads, and strike into the hills, slashing a way with our machetes when underbrush interfered, and leading the burros tied head to tail behind us; or we would come in from the Pacific side and come up by rail as far as we could to the interior, or if they had no railroad, as in Honduras, by auto 'bus, and then buy our pack-animals and start to cross the mountains and prospect down the other slope.

Arriving at what our hunches tell us is good prospecting ground we pitch camp, near some stream. We are in high ground now and it is fairly healthy but we arrange to boil our water for drinking-purposes, and place our camp on a well-drained spot. If it is not clear we slash off a clear spot and throw up our tent fly which is to serve us as a roof.

We have bought hammocks from the first native village we passed much better and cheaper than we could have done back home. We sling these from the trunks of trees, and get things in shipshape for several weeks' stay. We are going to prospect the country for ten miles in all directions.

The next morning we go out and do a little crevice hunting. The water has overflowed its

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banks many times and cut a wider channel than it used. At a convenient bend we dig away the gravel down to the bed-rock and scraping up the gravel and sand that is in the tiny cracks and pockets in the bed-rock we fill our gold pans and carry them to the water's edge.

We dip our pans into the water, fill them with water, and shake them savagely. This brings the larger pebbles to view. We scoop these off with our hands. Then, working more carefully, we begin to wash what remains. We use a slight rotary motion, holding one side lower than the other, and allowing the lighter sands to wash over the top, and scraping off the gravels with our hands, all the time adding more water as the process continues.

Finally we have no more than a double handful of sand in the edge of the bottom of the pan. Working very carefully now we keep washing the sand from the top and allowing it to run over the top of the pan with the water. Finally with an infinite amount of pains all we have is a couple of spoonfuls of black sand. Giving this a flip and allowing it to spread over the bottom of the pan we see golden specks mingled with the sand. We scrape this into a sack to heat over the fire in a shovel at night. When it is dry we will separate it by using a magnet or with quicksilver.

Quicksilver will pick up the gold and hold it in solution and then can be evaporated by holding it over the fire, leaving nothing but the gold soldered together in an amalgam.

We continue the search away from the stream often carrying the dirt for miles to get water to wash it with. Water and gravity. Dig to bed-rock and pan the gravel. Oh, I forgot about that horn spoon; that's to be used as a miniature pan for separating the gold from the black sand should we run out of quicksilver and lose our magnet. I guess I didn't bring any quicksilver with me in that outfit.

We have searched the country over and found no rich placer ground. It is true that pans have run several cents but we have not yet struck what we came in after. We are not looking for a place to make wages. We could do that without coming all this way to do it.

We start out up the mountain looking for floats. We find some and pulverize them with the hammer. We pan the powder in the pan, or horn spoon, as the case may be and find that the ore is low grade. Then we set about to see how much it runs to the ton by taking several pieces and estimating their weight and then seeing how much they run.

One of us happens to pick up a piece of "high grade" with the gold showing to the naked eye in fine lines. We start looking for the mother lode. It is above us. It can't be below us. So we travel on and on up the mountain until we find it, maybe.

If we do we file on it according to the law of whatever country we happen to be in. The gold-bearing rock will have to be mined from the earth, crushed to powder in a heavy "stamp mill," dissolved by a dilute solution of potassium cyanide, and then run over a "concentrating table" and deposited from this solution by an electric current. This is known as the cyanide process.

When several are going in together it is well to carry along a small portable Battersea, or similar, assaying-furnace. Also a small chest of chemicals for making the ordinary tests of minerals. The magnifying-glass will tell whether any yellow streak that shows in a piece of rock is gold or not.

Gold has the same color when viewed from all sides. In this it differs from "fool's gold." A piece no matter how small can be scratched with a knife point and when hammered with a hammer is very malleable. The ordinary acid test may be applied. Common sense and a trifle of rudimentary chemistry will soon teach how to make the tests for other metals. Any transparent pebble or strangely colored crystal should be saved.

The largest single nugget of gold was found in Australia. It was called the "Welcome" or "Welcome Stranger." It netted over $40,000 when melted down. It weighed over 180 pounds. If any one should find one of this size I will come down and help him bring it out on the shares. Just drop me a card!

When a man locates good placer ground he builds a sluice-box, which is a long trough with cleats nailed on the bottom to hold the gold. He runs a ditch from the nearest water and places his sluice-box so that the water will enter one end and run through.

He shovels in his dirt. The water washes the dirt to pieces and the gold sinks to the bottom, and is caught and held by the cleats.

"Hydraulic-ing" consists in building a dam high above and piping the water down and tearing the dirt from the mountainside with a high pressure nozzle and then placing sluice-boxes so as to allow the dirt and water to run through. In this way thousands of tons may be moved easily and placer ground made to pay when it would not do so otherwise. It is worth a trip to some large placer mine to see them quit sluicing at noon on Saturday and allow the boxes to run dry and see the yellow nuggets lying against the cleats until they back clear up to the next one, like yellow butter in the churn. Man, oh, man, don't it look good!

Write to the ticket-agent of the United Fruit Co., at either New York, or New Orleans, for current fares to Atlantic ports in Central America. Write to ticket-agent, Pacific Mail S. S. Co., San Francisco, California, for current fares to Pacific coast ports. Write Royal Mail S. S. Co., New York, for current fares to east coast of Colombia and Venezuela and west coast of Colombia, also for connecting fares from Trinidad, to the Guianas and ports of northern Brazil.

The addresses of these companies or their agents may be found in the "Official Railway Guide." Also see time-tables of Central American Railways in same guide, and other steamship lines for various parts of Central and South America.

See Rand McNally's large *library* atlas for maps and river boats. Write them at either New York or Chicago for catalog of maps of Latin America. Request your congressman to have Mr. John Barrett, Director-General, Pan American Union, Washington, D. C., send you his monograph covering each country. Also write the Department of Commerce, Latin American Division, Washington, D. C., for information covering same.

Also see what the "Encyclopedia Britannica" has to say concerning the country you are going to. It is well to study what it says concerning the different ways of mining, also. It goes into details concerning each process. Also consult it concerning the other metals and ores and the tests for determining them. If you are not going for a few months take a six months' subscription to the *Pan-American Bulletin*, official publication of the famous

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Pan-American Union, Washington, D. C., and get in intimate touch with things in Latin America and the tropics. Get copies of mining-laws from Pan-American Union. If you are near New York or the larger cities you can find them in the public libraries.

Other magazines dealing with current events in Central and South America are: *The Pan-American Magazine*, 70 Fifth Ave., New York City; and *The South American*, 61 Broadway, New York City. *The Pan-American Magazine* has no connection with the Pan-American Union, but it gives many articles each month written by experts which are authentic. *The Pan-American Bulletin* each month calls attention to articles worth reading that have appeared in other magazines.

Peru Today is a fine little magazine written in English and published in Lima, Peru, dealing with affairs on the west coast of South America near Lima. Their New York address is 20 Broad Street.

If you live outside of New York get a New York telephone directory through some company you deal with by sending them the price of postage and asking them to do so, and look up addresses of companies engaged in mining in Latin America, and write them direct for positions. Names of other companies, such as importers of furs, tropical products, etc., may be obtained in a similar manner. An old telephone directory will answer the purpose. You can find a thousand uses for it, *as I do*.

An overland trip may be made from any part of the United States to Guatemala City by rail and to each coast from there. To one who has roughed it and is short of cash I would suggest fourth-class from either El Paso, or Eagle Pass, Texas. The railroad in Guatemala may be left from any of the way stations and an outfit procured and a trip down into the countries south of there made.

There are good roads to Salvador and Honduras. Keep to high ground and avoid getting sick. Also you can travel faster. If you have to travel through swampy land, float down through it in a canoe or on a raft which has been arranged to keep out mosquitoes.

Any American you happen to meet up with down here will be glad to help you. Be sure to look up any of that jolly band of "Typical Tropical Tramps" who may be in the vicinity, shake hands with them, and ask them for any information they may be able to impart. They term themselves "tramps," but are far from such as we know them. *Adios! Que vaya bien!*

Asking for Fair Play

WHAT Mr. Harriman says below merits the careful consideration of any one wishing to use our "Ask Adventure" service. He asks for a square deal. We believe you will give him one:

If I may be allowed the space, I would like to say a word to those who prefer an interview to writing a letter of inquiry. A contingent that seems to be growing fast.

I am a working man. I earn my living by my daily labor. When I am in the midst of the creation of a story it is disastrous to have interruptions. I have builded for myself a study that stands high and well back, that I may be free from distractions. From eight in the morning till four in the afternoon I am busy there.

I am always glad to talk with an adventurer, young or old, but I claim the right to do my talking to suit my work hours. When any man comes here and insists on interrupting me, he is not a true man if he refuses to accept the statement made by my superior fraction, Mrs. H., and tries to argue the case and makes slighting remarks about the man who is not willing to talk.

I wish to serve notice here and now, on the section of the public that thinks it has a prior right to my time, that my rule will not be broken. When I am busy the only way to get me down from my study is to let me know that some scut is being rude to my wife. I'll come then, I promise you that, and I'll come all spraddled out. I will guarantee that I will make the interview a warm one.

After four o'clock, on any day when I am at home, I will be glad to receive any *Adventure* reader and show him all possible courtesy.

Only privileged friends received at other times and darned few of them, as my friends respect my reasons for seclusion.

Yours, a little hot under the collar,

E. E. HARRIMAN.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

THOMPSON, COLMAN. Son. Last heard of in Greenville, Maine, two years ago, working in a sawmill. Age thirty-three, height five feet nine inches, light complexion, scar on left foot. Any information will be thankfully received.—Address MRS. JAS. THOMPSON, Chamcook, N. B. Canada.

DUNCAN, GEORGE. Lived near Kremlin, Oklahoma, in 1895 and 1896, after moving to Colorado. Was reported to have died in Texas a few years later. About thirty years of age at that time; slender, light complexion and hair. Any information will be thankfully received.—Address J. B. DUNCAN, 208 East 72nd Street, New York City.

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BOHINZ, JACK. Brother. Last heard of in Frontenac, Kansas. Married, and followed coal mining. Any information will be gratefully received.—Address MARY BOHINZ, Box 75, North Yakima, Washington.

ROBINSON, RICHARD FREDERICK. Age fifty. Last heard of in Sacramento March, 1914.—Address J. A. ROBINSON, 505 King Street, Peterboro, Canada.

REEVES, WALLACE. Formerly of Birmingham, Ala., and last heard of in Muscle Shoals, Ala. Please write to your friend.—Address W. E. LOVE, R. F. D. No. 1, Charlotte, N. C.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

DOYLE, MICHAEL, of Kilgobnet, County Kerry. Last heard of in New Zealand, Australia, June, 1879. Any information gratefully received.—Address JEREMIAH DOYLE, 746 Broadway, Chelsea, Massachusetts.

KING, VANCE H. Son. Left home at age of fourteen; is now twenty-four. Dark, tall. Dark brown hair parted on left side. Scar on corner of mouth, and one like small rope on upper lip.—Address MRS. GUY C. KING, 136 2nd Street West, Port Angeles, Washington.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

FOLEY, PETER. Brother. Carpenter by trade. Forty-two years of age. Native of Cork City, Ireland. Last heard from working in Boston, Mass., five years ago. Any information will be gratefully received.—Address DANIEL J. FOLEY, 168 E. Congress St., Detroit, Michigan.

JEFFRIES, CHARLES D. Last heard of in Chehalis, Washington, two years ago. Was formerly in the Jeffries-Mears transfer business in Spokane. His former wife will be grateful for any information.—Address MRS. H. B. JEFFRIES, Hotel Seward, Portland, Oregon.

WARDELL, NORMAN. Lived in Erie, Pa. Sailor by profession. Light complexion, six feet and slim. Went to Texas oil-fields in April, 1918, from New Orleans. Sailed on the *Parismina*, fruit liner, and the *American Grace*, tramp steamship, both out of New Orleans. Write to EDW. SCHATZAN, your pal and shipmate.—Address 2149 Williams Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

RUNDHAUGEN, OLAF, and ERICKSON, BERNARD. Both emigrated from Norway several years ago; the latter about 1900. The former has been heard of living in Wisconsin. Any information will be gratefully received.—Address OLE B. KROGEN, Grenora, North Dakota.

WEST, W. CARLETON, U. S. Hospital Corps, 1903; HETTERICH, CARL, Battery "B" 2nd F. A., Camp Colombia, 1907; FERGUSON, HERMAN, Battery "A" 2nd F. A., Camp Colombia, 1907; STAIR, JOHN, San Francisco, 1915; HAMAN, BRUCE, Lima, Peru, 1917. Any information regarding the above will be gratefully received.—Address JOHN WINTHROP SARGENT, Care of *Adventure*.

BOWMAN, CLARENCE L. Last heard of in Birmingham, Alabama, bound for Reno, Nevada. Formerly with Swift & Co., N. S. Pittsburgh, Pa. Also fired out of Chicago on the Lake Shore to Elkhardt, Ind. Princeton man, six feet three, broad face and ruddy complexion, generally takes up athletics. Any information concerning him will be much appreciated.—Address KING E. FLAIG, Lt. Inf., Care of M. P. C. A. P. O. 762, France, or Care of 18 Brighton Rd., N. S. Pittsburgh, Pa.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the Mid-June or First July issue of Adventure. They can get name of the Inquirers from this magazine:

BEATON, SERGT. MAJOR GORDON M.; Birr, Rhodora; Bjerkander, Henry; Boyle, J. Gordon; Butler, Jack Ormonde; Caleb, Susanna; Coate, Tom; Coates, Frank; Coles, Hildegarde R.; Jenks, Althea, Nellie; Company A, 1st Kentucky; Curran, Hugh; Earle, William F.; Eaten, Herbert P.; Gross, Marlea; Hook, Mrs. Mary; Hunt, Charles; Jenks, Frank E.; Johnson, Sam H.; Keeffer or Keiffer, Lee, Delbert C.; Marshall, Bert W.; Martin, Abraham; Meggison, John B.; Noras, John; Rosinoff, Samuel; Ross, John K.; Shepherd, Guy M.; Smith, Forman; Thomas, James; Tompkins, Robt. A.; U. S. Naval Aviation Repair Base; Ward, Jos. M.; Williams, H. M.; Wright, Lem. K.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan, Lee Hays; Jack P. Robinson; Ray Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; O. B. Franklin; Lieutenant Wm. S. Hilles; G. H. Bennett; Bryon Chrisholm.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address J. E. COX, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

FIRST AUGUST NUMBER

Here are eight of the ten stories that the First August Issue will bring. The other two are listed on the second page of this number.

THE TREE OF LIFE — ***By Charles Beadle***
In the Congo a white man comes upon a strange superstition.

RESCUED — ***By Clyde B. Hough***
Datto Parang has a hidden casket of jewels, and *Crawson*, renegade, knows it.

A NIGHT IN THE WILDERNESS — ***By Walt McDougall***
Fresh from Ireland is *Jarvis*, and he finds his first night in the States a wild one.

"HOWLING JIM'S" PAL — ***By Hapsburg Liebe***
"*Lonesome*" was "*Howling Jim's*" pal and their friendship was the byword of the lumber-camp. Then trouble came.

NEEDS MUST — ***By Baroness Orczy***
A story of the French Revolution.

SAVAGES. A four-part story. Part II. — ***By Gordon Young***
To the South Sea Island where *Gilbert Lang* lives with "*Hurricane*" *Williams* and his strange tribe, comes a white man's boat.

ROGUE'S END — ***By Robert J. Pearsall***
The story of a lonely house and how it got a sinister name.

AGENT ANDY — ***By Russell A. Boggs***
Which tells how the steel gangers from the South help *Andy Peck* hold his job at Belham. A railroad story.

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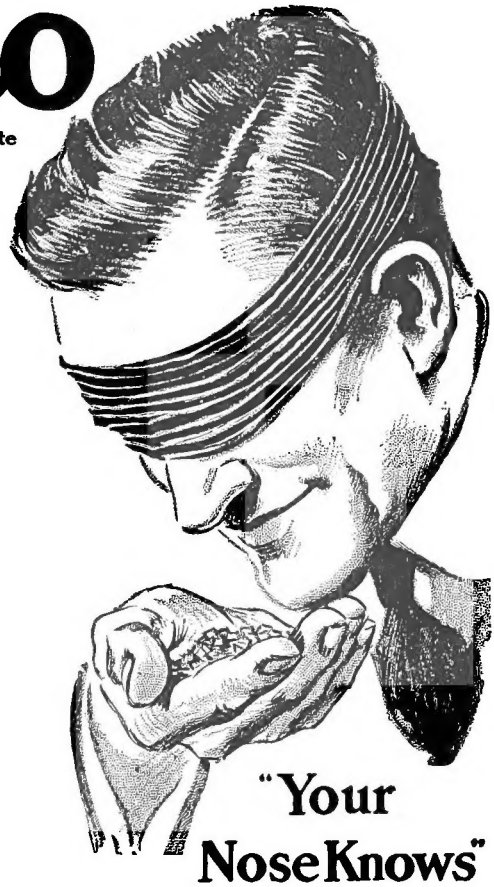
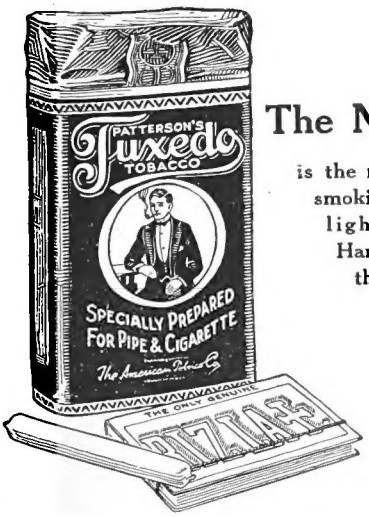
Tuxedo

The Perfect Tobacco For Pipe and Cigarette



Finest Burley Tobacco
Mellow-aged till perfect
+ a dash of *Chocolate*

"Your Nose Knows"



The New "TEA-FOIL" Package

is the most popular innovation of many years in smoking tobacco packages. Smokers are delighted with its many advantages. Handier—fits the pocket. No digging the tobacco out with the fingers. Keeps the pure fragrance of Tuxedo to the last pipeful. Not quite as much tobacco as in the tin, *but*—

10c

RIZ LA+—the lightest, thinnest, finest, strongest cigarette papers in all the world. Roll a Tuxedo cigarette with RIZ LA CROIX

Guaranteed by
The American Tobacco Co
INCORPORATED

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A Diagram Picture

Note the Pointed Corn

Why Corns Hurt

Note this diagram picture of a corn. Note its conical shape. The cause of the corn is pressure. And pressure makes it hurt. The point of the corn is pushed into the nerves.

Applying a Blue-jay plaster instantly removes the pressure. Note the felt pad (A) in the picture below. We apply no anesthetic. The pad gives barefoot comfort in the tightest shoe.

But that is temporary. One should not continue a pad. The corn should be quickly ended.

The bit of B&B wax in the center of the pad does that (as noted in illustration below). In two days, usually, the whole corn disappears. Only rare corns need a second application.

That's the great reason for Blue-jay. It stops the pain, then ends the corn. And it wraps the corn so the action is undisturbed.

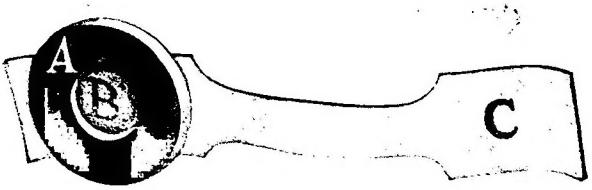
Then the action of the B&B wax is centered on the corn. Held there by the rubber coated adhesive tape which wraps comfortably around the toe. Healthy tissue is not affected.

These facts cannot be true of liquid applications.

Those are the reasons why millions of people have adopted the Blue-jay method. It is scientific, quick, comfortable and certain.

Keeping corns is folly when this easy way can end them. Treating them in cruder ways is inexcusable.

For your own sake, convince yourself by applying Blue-jay to one corn.



B&B **Blue-jay**

Stops Pain Instantly
Ends Corns Completely

The Scientific Corn Ender 25c at Druggists

BAUER & BLACK, *Makers of Sterile Surgical Dressings, etc.,* **Chicago, New York, Toronto**

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